

First pediatrician elected to Congress prioritizes health care, gun safety

February 19, 2019

Melissa Jenco, News Content Editor

Article type: [News](#)

Topics: [Advocacy](#)

As both a pediatrician and someone with type 1 diabetes, attacks on the Affordable Care Act (ACA) in 2017 felt personal to Kim Schrier, M.D., FAAP.

When she couldn't convince her congressman to vote against dismantling the program during a committee hearing, she decided to run for the seat herself.

"It really takes a lot to pull a pediatrician away from her practice because it's a wonderfully rewarding line of work," she said. "We get to heal children and work with families and make lives better. But the 2016 election was a huge turning point for me, and I really feel the policies of this current administration run counter to the best interest of children and families."

In November 2018, Dr. Schrier became the first pediatrician ever elected to Congress and now represents Washington state's 8th District.

'Heart of a primary care pediatrician'

Growing up, Dr. Schrier learned the value of education and hard work from her parents, an elementary school teacher and an aerospace engineer. She studied astrophysics at the University of California, Berkeley, before moving on to medical school.

"I wanted to study everything but also wanted to come out with a degree I could use," she said. "So I went for the sciences but discovered along the way I'm much more of a people person ... than I am a science lab person."

She also was inspired by Francine Kaufman, M.D., FAAP, the pediatric endocrinologist who treated her for type 1 diabetes when she was a teenager.

"I remember her telling me that she felt that women didn't really get enough respect in medicine and that she was going to show them, so she became the top student in her class," she said.

Dr. Schrier graduated from the University of California Davis School of Medicine in 1997 and did her residency at the Lucile Packard Children's Hospital at Stanford.

Before her foray into politics, she spent 16 years as a pediatrician with Virginia Mason, serving the Issaquah/Sammamish area of Washington where she lives with her husband, David, and fourth-grade son, Sam. In 2013, ParentMap magazine named her one of the best pediatricians in the Seattle area.

AAP President Kyle Yasuda, M.D., FAAP, a fellow Washington pediatrician, called her a "primary care pediatrician through and through."

"She's friendly, she's conscientious, she's energetic, she's passionate about kids and families," he said.

"She's empathetic, and she has the heart of a primary care pediatrician."

Going to bat for children

Entering politics wasn't on Dr. Schrier's radar, but she said she felt there was too much at stake for children — health care, nutrition programs, environmental protection, early childhood education and more — to sit on

the sidelines.

Seven-term Congressman Dave Reichert decided to retire, so Dr. Schrier, a Democrat, was pitted against Republican Dino Rossi, a businessman and former state senator, in a race *The Seattle Times* called “the most expensive House race in state history.”

On the campaign trail, Dr. Schrier told voters that because of her background as a pediatrician and her personal experience with type 1 diabetes she understands how difficult it is to worry about affordable health care. Her health care platform included restoring the ACA, expanding Medicare while working toward Medicare for all, and lowering prescription drug prices.

Washington’s 8th District hadn’t elected a Democrat in the past, but Dr. Schrier believes her campaign was strengthened by being a government outsider and a trusted pediatrician.

“With the attacks on health care and the need for ... real representation and caring, well that’s what you get with a pediatrician,” she said. “Somebody who is used to listening and helping families who clearly does not lose touch with what goes on in the lives of people’s families and who will really represent them when it comes to health care.”

AAP CEO/Executive Vice President (Interim) Mark D. Del Monte, J.D., called Dr. Schrier’s election historic and said it demonstrates the importance of pediatrician leadership outside the clinical setting.

A week after her Jan. 3 swearing-in ceremony, he and the AAP Executive Committee filled her office for her first official meeting.

“Never before has there been a member of Congress with more expertise in the needs of children and youth,” Del Monte said. “Dr. Schrier will be a uniquely powerful voice in Congress for children from gun violence prevention to the needed improvements in the health care system.”

Dr. Schrier already has signed on to co-sponsor legislation requiring universal background checks for gun ownership and said she hopes to work on additional legislation to use technology to help keep guns out of the hands of young children.

“It’s harder to get into my iPhone than it is to get a gun for kids,” she said. “And when we have an average age of accidental shooting in children being 3, it wouldn’t take a ton of brain power or technology to make sure those guns are owned safely.”

Legislation to limit family separation at the border also lists Dr. Schrier as a co-sponsor. She said she empathizes with the plight of immigrants seeking refuge and knows the potential impact of their journey and separation.

“Whether we’re talking about emotional effects and a lack of resiliency, shutting down or overreacting in the future or even lifelong medical outcomes from toxic stress, these things matter and families should be kept together and families should not be in jail,” she said.

Dr. Schrier will serve on the House Education and Labor Committee and the Agriculture Committee. The latter will give her an opportunity to provide expertise on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and school lunches.

Asked about her future, she said, “My heart will always be in pediatrics.”

“We’ll see what the voters want in two years and we’ll see how things go here,” she said. “I’m hoping that wherever that future leads me that I can do more good for more children here from Washington, D.C., than I could just in my office and I think my patients understand that.”