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Pop Stars on the Hill

By Janie Lorber

Speaker Nancy Pelosi is from California, so of course she likes stars — especially when they cast just the right light on her legislative goals.

Today, [Paul Simon](#) joined Ms. Pelosi to sing the praises of the Democrats' health care legislation — literally.

“Poor kids can't vote, neither can they afford to hire lobbyists to plead their cause,” he sang and added, in a spoken, but equally melodious tone: “Let's cut out the political stuff and pass this legislation that is very much needed.”

It's certainly not uncommon for lawmakers to use celebrities as attention grabbers for their agenda, and Ms. Pelosi, not surprisingly, seems to be at home with the ploy. Today she met with four entertainers within four hours to highlight two separate causes - health care and education.

“We think in politics we are in the field of attraction, that we are trying to attract people to what we say,” Ms. Pelosi said to a small group of health care advocates and reporters gathered on the Capitol's West Lawn. “Well, sometimes that happens, but our message is greatly amplified by someone in another field who's devoted their life to this cause.”

Under mounting pressure to pass a health care bill, Ms. Pelosi sought out Mr. Simon, a co-founder of **Children's Health Fund**, an organization that works to improve access to health care for poor children and has spent \$129,000 on lobbying this year. Jane Pauley, the former host of NBC's “Today Show,” was also there.



Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images. The House speaker, Nancy Pelosi, with Paul Simon outside the Capitol on Wednesday.

Later this afternoon Ms. Pelosi met with Marc Anthony and Jennifer Lopez and the Congressional Hispanic Caucus to highlight college financial aid legislation the House will consider this week.

The speaker's tactic seemed to work. It's a busy week for Ms. Pelosi with lawmakers and the Capitol Hill press corps consumed by the debate over health care. Still, some 15 reporters and photographers waited outside her office for more than an hour for the singers, who were apparently running late from a visit to the White House.

Celebrities also help advocates get the ears of lawmakers.

"Paul Simon has opened a lot of doors in the last few decades," said Dr. Irwin Redlener, who co-founded the health fund with Mr. Simon in 1987. "He has helped the health care community get access to Congress — meetings that I wouldn't have been able to get."

It was Ms. Pelosi's second invitation to Mr. Simon in just a few weeks. She invited him to attend President Obama's address to a joint session of Congress earlier this month. (Mr. Simon had to decline and said he owed her a phone call, which he "predictably forgot.")

"The relationships, they deepen with repeat visits," said Mr. Simon. "The more you get to know somebody the longer the conversations get." He added that he's met with Ms. Pelosi on four separate occasions in the last couple of years and enjoys the closest relationship with her of all the members he's worked with on this issue.