

By Jill Cowan June, 27, 2011 [Link](#)

Jeff Miller goes through a lot of juice in a year.

"It's probably hundreds of dollars, maybe even into the thousands of dollars of juice boxes," Miller's father, Bill Miller said.

Miller, an incoming senior at Bakersfield's Centennial High School, was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes at age 11, and he said he hits the juice boxes when his blood sugar is low.

"Anytime before I eat or exercise, I have to check my blood sugar," he said. "If it's low, I have to eat some sugar, and if it's high, I have to take a certain amount of insulin to get it back in range."

Miller said even after his diagnosis, he's still "just a normal kid." He plays varsity tennis and has a 4.2 grade point average.

But for Bill Miller, his son's diabetes is "a constant worry," he said, "because to be quite frank, he could die from it."

Last week, Miller was one of 150 kids from across the country living with Type 1 diabetes who traveled to Washington, D.C., for the 2011 Children's Congress.

The biannual congress is organized by the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation, which is chaired by Mary Tyler Moore.

The three-day event gave kids the chance to meet with members of Congress and advocate for increased funding for Type 1 diabetes research. Miller represented the Greater Los Angeles chapter of JDRF, which includes the Central Valley, home of some of the state's highest Type 1 diabetes rates.

Diabetes is the "number two" chronic illness in the Central Valley, second only to asthma.

"We don't know why it's even worse in the Central Valley," Bill Miller said.

JDRF Los Angeles chapter executive director Bob Reid said that, although Type 1 diabetes is "an autoimmune disease," not caused by improper diet or obesity, like Type 2 diabetes can be, it is triggered by external factors.

"There's a genetic predisposition or marker that has to be triggered by an environmental factor," Reid said.

What exactly those triggers are, Reid called "the million-dollar question."

Of course, it could more accurately called the billion-dollar question.

"Over \$174 billion annually is spent on diabetes in the United States," Miller said, \$2 billion of which would be saved if the federal Food and Drug Administration approves the artificial pancreas for use in the United States.

Accelerating approval of the device, which would automatically regulate users' insulin levels, thus taking "a lot of pressure off the diabetic," Miller said, was one of the primary goals of this year's congress.

Armed with statistics and stories, the delegates attended a senate hearing, and met with their respective congressional representatives.

"We think it was very successful," Miller said with characteristic polish. "They actually showed very strong bipartisan support."

Miller said he met with aides of senators Barbara Boxer and Dianne Feinstein, but he was most excited about meeting Congressman Kevin McCarthy.

"It was really great," Miller said. "He must be a really important leader because he was very busy."

At first, Miller said he was "a little nervous" about meeting government officials but once he said he got to talking with them, "it was very down to earth and really nice talking to them."

McCarthy, for his part, was "impressed by his knowledge and commitment to Type 1 diabetes research."

McCarthy said he's actually known Miller since Miller played soccer with McCarthy's son, Connor, in elementary school.

"I've watched him grow up and face these challenges," McCarthy said. "He's a very impressive spokesman."

Though the Millers had visited McCarthy in Washington before, this time, McCarthy said, "he came to lobby for his cause."

But Miller said he doesn't have political aspirations.

"I've come to the decision that I'd like to be an endocrinologist so that I can treat other diabetics," he said. Maybe by then, he'll do it with a cure, not juice.