2013 AVMA President’s HOD Address

Friends, colleagues, guests, fellow citizens of Vetlandia:

I want to thank the House Advisory Committee for giving me a brief opportunity to speak to you all, the leaders, members and staff of this great organization, for one last time while in this office. Serving as president of AVMA has been the experience of a lifetime, an honor and a privilege I've appreciated each and every day this year. Thank you, one and all.

One of the things I would like to focus on is our role as the "Big Tent", AVMA's mandate to represent the length and breadth of this wonderful and varied profession. As I've said many times, we are an indispensable resource for a very small profession, for 150 years a unique tool that serves to amplify our voice, in a society that values the work we do while it threatens to run us over in every way.

Veterinary medicine has organizations that serve every sector of the profession; most of them are represented right here in this room today. AVMA can't match your alignment on the issues that are important to your members - and you shouldn't expect it of us.

What we do is look after the interests of the whole profession, lending a more powerful voice to our members on issues of importance to them and to the greater veterinary community. If we're doing the right things we won't make everybody happy all the time but, instead, continuing to take the long view, to help us move towards a stronger, more secure and influential profession.

I say to our more relentless critics: be fair, be constructive and be realistic. AVMA is a work in progress. Our volunteer leaders are colleagues who are volunteering their time and the talents they have to serve the profession we all love.

To the leaders in House of Delegates, I want to remind you that the governance proposals you're considering this week are proactive, intended to make us more nimble and responsive, better constituted to attract and retain a new generation of members, and allow them to participate in ways that meet their needs and desires. No one wants to turn us into a one-dimensional association, or to see us fail. Change isn't good; it's necessary.

Finally, the sky isn't falling. There is no malevolent mastermind at work on our profession - no Dr. Evil; for that matter, no Professor Evil, no Evil Incorporated or Evil.com. No EVMA, either.

A veterinary degree doesn't come with a guarantee of future success, and each of us - clinicians, teachers, researchers, government and corporate vets - has to work every day to serve our patients and meet the needs of our clients. We're facing some complex problems, the causes of which are various and not easily addressed - examples of what are called wicked problems. There will be no quick fix in store for us.

What we do have is more control over our individual careers and the fate of our profession than we acknowledge. Let's get out of our funk and roll up our sleeves. There's work to be done, veterinarians can do it and we're not done yet.

Keep the faith, and thanks.