2016 PRESIDENT-ELECT'S SPEECH to the AVMA House of Delegates

Thank you all. To our delegates, colleagues, friends and guests: I want to extend my heartfelt gratitude and appreciation for the opportunity to take up the reins as president of this wonderful association.

I stand here today on the shoulders of my distinguished predecessors, who have guided me, encouraged me and challenged me, and who have believed in me enough to urge me out of my comfort zone.

To the Washington State Veterinary Medical Association, my mentors and close colleagues who have stood by me, inspired me and pushed me, thank you from the bottom of my heart.

To my wife, Jean, my partner and the love of my life, thank you for your support, your encouragement and for being by my side every step of the way.

And I would be remiss if I didn’t thank our outgoing president, Dr. Joe Kinnarney, for his dedicated service. He has done a tremendous job leading our efforts to address issues important to veterinary medicine and continuing our long history of faithfully serving our members and the profession. I look forward to having him by my side as immediate past president as we build on the progress we have made under his leadership and continue to make the AVMA an association our members are proud to call their own.

I shared my vision and direction for the AVMA when I ran for the office of president-elect two years ago. I referred to the AVMA as the linchpin that holds our diverse, complex profession together.

With that diversity and complexity comes the necessity to have an organizational structure and direction that maintains value and relevancy for our members and the profession. As president, my focus is on navigating the future and why it’s important to do so with purpose and certainty so the AVMA continues to be that linchpin.

As an association, we have made remarkable progress in the all-important areas of member engagement, leadership development and inclusion, just to name a few, but we still have work to do. We must continue to protect, promote and advance this honorable profession, and give our members the tools they need to better achieve their professional goals and better serve the animals they love. It’s also important that we continue to build on our outreach and collaboration efforts with other stakeholders on initiatives related to economics, wellness, One Health, communication and diversity.

As you know, our Economics Division is generating the most comprehensive, up-to-date and reliable economic data ever seen in the profession. This needs to continue, and we are working on better ways to interpret and utilize the information obtained to help increase the profitability and economic rewards for veterinarians.

We also need to continue the momentum we have built in improving the overall economic picture for young veterinarians, particularly when it comes to promoting action to reduce student debt. Our Fix the Debt summit in April was an important milestone in allowing folks from all walks of veterinary life to gather, roll up their sleeves, and actively
identify and develop real solutions to help ease the financial burdens on our students and young veterinarians.

A committee formed to maintain momentum on the initiatives that came out of the debt summit continues to identify individuals at the national, state and local levels who will champion the cause. We’re excited about what the future holds as we work to address this issue through a number of efforts and opportunities.

This committee is meeting tomorrow morning, and I’m sure the discussions will focus on what we’ve accomplished so far and identifying next steps and objectives. There is a commitment to this economic issue that will grow stronger as we continue to work together to ease what we can all agree has become financial quicksand for our students and young veterinarians.

Wellness is an issue that is top-of-mind for many of us. We as an association are making strides by committing new energy and resources to improving wellness among our peers and among our students. Our first-ever wellness roundtable in March brought some great discussion and affirmed our commitment to helping address the growing wellness issues facing so many in the profession. The roundtable helped us set the stage for continuing efforts that will address the topics of wellness and well-being in the profession, and I look forward to leading the AVMA in these efforts.

My family is not immune from our own wellness issues. When memory loss settled in for us a little ways back and became a permanent resident in our lives, Jean and I, and our children, had choices to make.

Would we let the new circumstances and the condition rule the day, or would we accept the new reality, change the way we looked at our limitations and embrace each day as a new day, filled with opportunity and hope?

We chose the latter, partially inspired by a Bible verse we hold very dear. It is from John, Chapter 5, Verse 8, and it tells the story of a lame man, an invalid for decades, who, due to his condition, could not reach the Pool of Bethesda. When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked the man, “Do you want to get well?” When the man lamented that he had no one to help him into the pool, and that while he was trying to get in, someone else went down ahead of him, Jesus told him to, “Get up, pick up your mat and walk.”

Through the help of hope, the man was cured, and he picked up his mat and walked. My family, Jean and I, and the kids, decided to pick up our mat and walk. We continue to walk today, guided by each other’s strength and support.

It is this type of strength and support that so many of our colleagues need, and I submit to you today that I will work as AVMA president to help ensure that the AVMA continues to be a participant in helping improve the wellness and well-being of our colleagues and friends. It is part of our duty as both association leaders and compassionate caregivers. And it is something I care deeply about.

As I begin to wrap up, I have to emphasize that the AVMA wouldn’t be what it is today without the support and involvement of our members. Our members are the lifeblood of our organization. We must be able to change and adapt to continue to be relevant for
and trusted by our members. Our relationship with our members is a symbiotic one that requires their participation to thrive.

Good communication is critically important to achieve productivity and maintain strong working relationships at all levels. As an association, we need to continue to provide and explore effective communications channels to our membership and the public sector as to all we are doing in the areas of advocacy, accreditation, veterinary economics, member services and providing leadership for the veterinary community, and so much more.

It is my hope that all veterinarians recognize the value they contribute as AVMA members, and that we as an association work diligently to provide our members with the services, products and support they need.

Our members have told us firsthand that the AVMA needs to be a leader in the profession. It’s not easy to lead. Leading means risk-taking; it means putting yourself out there in times of both challenge and opportunity. It means, as I shared just a few minutes ago, getting out of your comfort zone.

Leading is a learned skill, based largely, in my opinion, on being able to listen first and act second. Leading involves making tough decisions, some of which may not be popular amongst the rest of the crowd. The AVMA continues to listen and learn from its members. And I dare say that the AVMA is now more than ever open to the ideas and the concerns of our members. Our new way of doing business, our new way of ensuring that we meet member needs, is based on that listening and learning.

In order to achieve our goals of protecting, promoting and advancing both veterinarians and the veterinary profession, it is important for each of us to lead, and for all of us – House of Delegates, Board of Directors, councils and committees – to work together as a team. Together, we can more effectively advance our shared interests, values and goals.

At the end of the day, it’s my hope that we continue to attract the best and the brightest to our profession, and provide them with opportunities to achieve their dreams and goals professionally and economically. At the same time, it’s also my hope that we preserve the public’s trust and the high value it has placed in our profession, and that we continue to educate the public at all levels to understand and appreciate the daily contributions veterinary medicine makes to the well-being of both animals and people.

As I continue to serve our national association, I will focus on inclusion and the participation of our entire diverse membership as we continue to address the pressing issues before us. Whether it is wellness, economics, One Health or member services, it is essential that the AVMA embrace our membership and unify our efforts to advocate for the robust future of veterinary medicine.

As we forge ahead, let us harness our creativity and collectively commit to the future well-being of our profession.

Again, thank you for giving me the opportunity of a lifetime to serve as your president. I look forward to working with you in the year ahead and moving the AVMA forward to an even better future.
Thank you.