To the House of Delegates:

What a difference a year can make, or in this case, the difference of the last 6 months. Our lives are so very different, and you are all in my thoughts as I hope that you, your loved ones, your communities, your workplaces are as healthy and safe as they can be. If they are not, and you and/or others you know have lost, know that my heart goes out to you.

This is a time that has forced us to reprioritize and refocus so many things in our lives. I know it has done that for me.

Before I share the story of my second and final year as AVMA Vice-President, let me say how thankful I am to all of you for electing me to this officer position, and for the wonderful opportunities I have had. I hope I have served this role with diligence, dedication, compassion, and grace. That has been my goal.

As you know, the AVMA Vice-President's responsibilities have evolved to assisting and supporting the national SAVMA House of Delegates and Executive Board along with serving as liaison to the faculty and deans of all AVMA-accredited veterinary schools with SAVMA student chapters. This has been an exciting transition time for the Vice-President’s role and I have enjoyed breaking ground in this new assignment. Supporting and assisting the individual schools' SAVMA chapters is in the capable hands of the three AVMA staff Student Initiatives Assistant Directors.

My second VP year kicked off with the annual SAVMA Chapter President Summit in September in Schaumburg. It was great to meet all of the newly-elected Chapter Presidents. I love engaging in their energy and enthusiasm as they work on team-building exercises with each other and share their plans and ideas for their chapters for the year.

I took this opportunity to hold the first of many faculty focus groups that I conducted there about their impressions of AVMA and how AVMA could best help them.
Terrific ideas and information were exchanged, and it was the first of many faculty groups I held from September to February where I learned of faculty needs and how AVMA might best help them.

The faculty focus groups, while still in their infancy, have taught me that AVMA can help faculty in the areas of promoting the academic/research path to those considering or entering our profession, aid in their areas of faculty wellness, and continue to promote our profession to the public however we can. This is a just a sampling of some faculty ideas.

It was interesting how I started and finished my school "visits" this final year of my term with my first school visit this year to Lincoln Memorial College of Veterinary Medicine and concluding with a virtual commencement address this past May there. Thank you LMU for your kind invitations.

During my LMU visit, I had a dual job where I worked with the students on AVMA's first ever student Virtual Town Hall which was conducted with the UC Davis School of Veterinary Medicine. I also held a faculty focus group and the faculty were wonderful in sharing their thoughts and ideas with me.

October 10th was the day for AVMA's first-ever student virtual town hall. The students of Lincoln Memorial and UC Davis made sure it was a smashing success. The students chose the topic of wellness and the deans, faculty and Dr. Mary Ergen, AVMA District Director III, and I kicked off the event from our respective locations. We also had a wonderful heart-felt video greeting from Dr. Will McCauley, delegate from Washington, DC.

The students ran the rest of the show with real-time surveys on wellness ratings within their schools and shared and discussed the results instantaneously. They then had wonderful virtual chats regarding wellness concerns, school wellness activities, and what life was like on each other's respective campuses.

160 LMU and 80 UC Davis students enjoyed the town hall immensely and it reinforced that "they were not alone" and "we are in this together". Big kudos to all the students who worked so hard to make this event a success.

My Vice-President travels took me to Tufts University Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine to meet with the new Dean there, Dr. Alistair Cribb. He shared with me his plans to enhance clinical training from programs he initiated in Calgary. He also reinforced his feeling that we all need to encourage more students to enter the fields of veterinary research and academia.
Shortly thereafter, I visited K-State where I met with Dean Bonnie Rush and many students there. We discussed the beautiful new plans for the school remodel and the excitement over hosting the SAVMA Symposium in 2021.

In early December, I had another great visit, this time at the University of Pennsylvania. I had a great meeting with Dean Andy Hoffman and faculty members. We reviewed many student wellness initiatives initiated by both AVMA and the school. We also discussed an innovative new dual degree at Penn Vet. The new VMD/MSW program will train students in both veterinary medicine and social work to aid clients, the public and the profession itself with difficult human-animal interaction wellness issues.

In February, I joined the students for a Legislative Fly-In in Washington, DC. Our Government Relations Division did another spectacular job in preparing students and practitioners alike in calling on their legislators to discuss important bills regarding One Health, the national Veterinary Laboratory system and student debt. Little did we know that in less than 2 short months how critical these issues would become in the face of a global pandemic.

Not knowing how quickly my Vice-President travel would be wound down, I was fortunate to fit in a trip to Ross University School of Veterinary Medicine on St. Kitts. There I attended a Clinical Placement Ceremony and learned more about students from all over the world learning to adapt to an island's culture.

I also visited the two new schools in Arizona -- Midwestern and University of Arizona. These newer schools demonstrated to me that the future of veterinary education is bright, with passionate faculty, innovative training ideas, and a keen eye on where we want to go, not where we have been. Thank you Deans Graves and Funk for your kind hospitality.

My last trip before the travel window closed was to the AAVMC Annual Conference in Washington, DC. It seemed fitting that it was my final visit as many deans, faculty, administrators and AVMA staff and volunteers were there to discuss issues that now seem prescient, such as new teaching/learning platforms and the importance of including diversity and inclusion in everything we do among many others.

Sadly, the SAVMA Symposium scheduled for March at Cornell had to be cancelled due to COVID-19. It was so disappointing as I know how hard the students there worked to prepare for what I am sure would have been an incredible Symposium. But being the stalwart veterinary students they are, they put their chins up, found ways to put some lectures on-line, donated food orders that could not be cancelled to community groups in need, and showed that when the going gets tough, the tough get going.
Our SAVMA House of Delegates and Executive Board demonstrated that in spades by conducting an extremely well-run and successful virtual HOD meeting. Let's see if us oldsters can match that.

What a time this has been for all of us as we navigate and press forward through these incredibly uncertain times. I know we will do this with strength and resilience. As after all, isn't this what we are trained to do? We do our best to make the uncertain certain through our powers of observation, our diagnostic training, and our fundamental belief we can help make things better. I know we can get through all of this if we do it as one.

Thank you my AVMA family, for allowing me this incredibly opportunity to serve as your Vice-President. I hope I have done my job well.

I will close my speech as I did one year ago at our convention in Washington, DC. Remember, "you are not alone" and "we are all in this together".

Thank you so very much.