2021 President-Elect Speech

Members of the House of Delegates, Board of Directors, AVMA staff, friends, and family,

Serving as AVMA President-Elect has been a tremendous and interesting experience. Because of the pandemic I have conducted my role mostly in a virtual manner. There were days, when I had 4 Zoom meetings, and others where I gave hour long presentations in both English and Spanish to colleagues and students in the US and abroad, about different topics such as Telemedicine, Organized Veterinary Medicine, and Veterinary Medical Education. I had the honor of giving the Convocation speech to the Inaugural class of the University of Arizona College of Veterinary Medicine. It has also been my pleasure to assist and back up President Doug Kratt during the past year. The pandemic and the social unrests that occurred during the past 15 months, shifted our focus and we placed a strong emphasis on messaging about COVID-19, and diversity, equity, and inclusion within the veterinary profession. Dr Kratt has done an outstanding job dealing with these issues and others, and it was my privilege to assist or represent him during his year as AVMA President.

As I reflect on the past 7 years that I have worked together with Dr. John Howe, while he served as BOD District VII Director and as AVMA President-Elect, President, and Immediate Past President, I have to say Muchas Gracias John for your dedication in promoting veterinary medicine and for always striving to think of our members first, in all the decisions we've made. You have done a commendable job, and I am sure you will continue to champion our profession in the years to come. I also look forward to future private tequila lectures and tastings from you, maybe in Cabo San Lucas.

As COVID-19 pandemic restrictions continue to loosen and we transition to a new normalcy, following an unprecedented and unimaginable past year-and-a-half, I am excited and look forward to continuing our great work in unison with this HOD, the BOD, our volunteers in Councils and Committees, and AVMA staff. Working collaboratively will help optimize the way we serve our members and make a positive difference in the lives of present and future veterinarians and our patients.

The pandemic has given us a greater appreciation for how intertwined veterinary medicine is, and how working together on common issues makes our voices stronger. It has opened many eyes and reinforced the importance of the One Health concept. It is of utmost importance that we continue to promote One Health, recognizing that the interconnections between people, animals, and their shared environment have become more significant and impactful than ever. We must remain focused on pursuing and strengthening relationships with other global veterinary associations and intergovernmental institutions to support public health, animal health and welfare around the world.

I am very proud of my Puerto Rican and Spanish roots; they are an intricate part of who I am and have helped shape my perspective on life. Being the first Puerto Rican President of the AVMA is certainly an honor, but it comes with personal and professional responsibilities. I will do my best to lead by example and send a clear message of inclusiveness that will hopefully inspire other minorities to become involved in organized veterinary medicine. As the AVMA Board liaison to the Commission for a Diverse, Equitable, and Inclusive Veterinary Profession, I will continue to work with our veterinary partners to help achieve greater diversity, equity, and inclusion in our profession.

Veterinary medicine continues to face formidable economic challenges and societal demands. High educational debt, income, retirement and covid related concerns, scope-of-practice issues, and the
necessity to maintain a healthy work-life balance all contribute to wellbeing issues within our profession. As President, I will strive to improve the educational debt-to-income disparities that exist in our profession by advocating in Congress for legislation that would make possible low-interest or interest-free student loans and to make veterinary medical education more accessible. I will foster an environment that promotes the mental health, emotional wellbeing, and personal happiness of veterinarians, veterinary staff, and students both at work and at home.

I see the role of the President as an Ambassador of our profession, and of a strong advocate of the AVMA family. Whether it is the AVMA, AVMF, AVMA Trusts, AVMA PAC, or the Student AVMA, I am committed to help ensure all parts of the AVMA family work together to serve the needs of our members more effectively.

In the year ahead, I will do my best to be a strong leader who listens to, and represents all our members, advocates for our profession, and inspires others to do the same. Together, we will work towards an AVMA that better meets the needs of society while protecting, promoting, and advancing a unified veterinary profession.