

Welcome to San Diego.

Good morning and thank you for being here to see to the business and to the administration of your Academy.

I want also to thank our staff, headed by our Executive Director, Mr. McFarlane, and our corporate sponsors, partners, and exhibitors. Please patronize them by visiting the exhibit floor and in your daily business dealings in your offices.

Our association was built on the sweat of its volunteers, the strength of its membership, the resolve of its advocacy, and the perception of its image. Our leadership and staff are the reflection of its members and constitution to the rest of the world.

While management deals with today, leadership deals with change and how to bring about this change to heed the wishes of this House.

A wise man once said, "We have to be daring, courageous, and most of all diligent in embracing change!" and that, my friends, we have done. To change we have to act. And that we are doing.

You elected me three years ago because you heard my message and approved it. You saw my vision and endorsed it. A vision and a message that transcends political alliances, personal agendas, motives, or self aggrandizement. A vision that started with those who preceded me and will continue with Howard and Jeff and whomever you choose to be your next VP. To increase membership, to strengthen advocacy, and to publicize our image. More than that, to facilitate growing the Academy's business infrastructure by building strong and profitable alliances and partnerships, as well as streamlining the Academy's operations to be more nimble in meeting the wants and needs of our members in this ever-changing business world. I delivered on those promises. My job is done.

We started the critical changes not only in the day-to-day operations, but throughout the structure of the Academy, and those changes already are returning great dividends in all areas: membership services, finance, communication, dental education, corporate sponsorships, and information technology.

Our staff, our councils, and committees all have been charged with a simple premise when deliberating programs and benefits: What is in it for our members? What is the value it will add to membership? The same message is broadcast to our partners and sponsors: First and foremost, what is in it for the AGD?

Intelligent organizations as ours look to the future, they adapt their operating models, and update their governance, not only to maximize their resources, but also to maximize the talents and time of both volunteers and staff. We are constantly reevaluating our operational systems, redesigning our services, trying to accommodate a more virtual environment and social networks; yet keeping that personal touch and involvement that only a membership-based organization can provide. That adds strength, longevity, durability, value, and long-lasting success and that is what is driving us.

Value, need, accountability, measurable outcomes, checks, and balances are the terms our business model and systems are following. Every decision is evaluated against that model.

Systems and staff were reorganized to maximize efficiency in managing valued and needed projects and to support councils and committees. Projects without measurable outcomes or rationale were dropped.

Each council and committee was evaluated. Each needed to be accountable and each was held accountable. Performance and measurable outcomes were demanded. A task force of leaders spent the better part of last year researching and looking into best practices to streamline councils and committees. Staffing was and will be adjusted accordingly.

A resolution is in front of you this session that does just that. Please support it.

A second task force of leaders was looking into the issue of governance, again, and how to streamline the process and make it more manageable. Governance has to be overhauled no doubt, in order for us not to just survive, but to thrive.

It is not enough just to separate the scientific session from governance but governance itself has to be reconfigured, including but not limited to size, function, and responsibility. It must be fitted to accommodate the changing world of nonprofits. We knew that years ago and debated it and hopefully, you, this House will approve the overhaul once it is presented to you. It is a hard decision and an unselfish one to make, but it has to be made.

A third task force and the Board are looking into our annual meeting again to streamline it and bring it to conform with the times and to our members' demands and wishes. Some of these decisions may be controversial, but they need to be made to refit and right-size this Academy. It is the right thing to do.

These comprehensive changes were all instituted through exhaustive studies by task forces over months of hard work and many challenges, but the results are undeniable. They need to be done.

This is the first year we turned the tide of membership attrition and gained more than 2,000 members, thanks to your efforts in recruiting. Retention was better than past years and that is an area we all have to work harder at.

Look at our bottom line—it testifies to our conservancy, our budgetary restraint, and financial responsibility, and yet our dues are the lowest among all associations and our benefits rank among the best, thanks to long-term planning by the Board and by the Budget and Finance Committee and the Investment Committee. Thank you Dr. Smith, Dr. Brown, and Dr. Portwood, and our thanks go to your committees.

A real estate task force was created two years ago, chaired by Dr. Gary Myers, to look at relocating the AGD Headquarters office by early 2014 when our lease expires. The American Dental Association (ADA) is very much aware and is supportive of our decision. We are making great strides and we will be on our own at the right time.

Last year, this House approved our strategic plan. Your Executive Committee, your Board, your councils and committees, and your staff are very much focused on following the master plan to its desired conclusion. As you well know, the plan has two goals: The first goal of our strategic plan focuses on our membership and the way to grow it through continuing education.

Our association was created and nurtured with the premise that general dentists achieve excellence through continuing education (CE). That was, is still, and will always be the case. Now we are faced with fierce competition from multiple providers and a slew of organizations offering what we offer and more. We no longer can remain or afford to remain a predominantly CE recording organization, but need to transform into an integral supplier and provider of quality CE on a national level—even on an international level.

Dentists are hungry for continuing education here and abroad, they are thirsty for knowledge no matter where they are located, albeit the Far East, the Middle East, Africa, Australia, Europe, South America, or right here on our continent. We started on that path by creating an international membership task force chaired by Dr. Bruce Small.

We improved the value and/or the experience our members have and deserve, whether it is a casual contact with staff on the phone or with any representative of this organization, whether on a local or national level. We tried and always will try to become an organization of value.

The second goal focuses on advocacy and the Academy's role as the voice of the general dentist. We sat at the tables of all who invited us to do so and were very effective. But more importantly, as the voice of the general dentist, we have to have all those other organizations sit at our table and partake in our views and principles.

We have, as an organization, advocated on behalf of our members, promoted our Fellowship and Mastership awards, and upheld our ideals and values to all.

We stood up to the defense of our principles, our policies, and our members' rights in the ADA House, in the private sector, and on the state and federal levels. We have won a few skirmishes, but make no mistake—the battle has not been won. It is just beginning and you, each and every one of you, are the one to carry the message to your local dental association, to the ADA House and to every state capital and the halls of Congress.

We opposed and will always oppose mid-level providers in any way, shape, or form, or by whichever name they were and are called. That is our policy and the wish of this House. When we did so in San Antonio during Dr. Paula Jones's presidency, we were called obstructionists (among other less-flattering names) but times proved us right.

We did that because "Standing for right when it is unpopular is a true test of moral character." (Margaret Chase Smith)

And, as Aristotle said, "We did not act rightly because we have virtue or excellence, but we rather have those because we acted rightly."

We still oppose mid-level providers because the public does not deserve a lower standard of care, our patients do not deserve compromised treatments, and our profession doesn't need unqualified under trained high schoolers doing any procedures reversible or otherwise. It just doesn't work.

To those that advocate the concept, I say, there is no shortage of dentists; underserved areas have fleeting borders and boundaries. It is not a matter of access to care; it is a matter of access to money—follow the money. It is a matter of underutilization of care. It is a matter of literacy. Inform and educate and start with the parents and guardians. Those are all barriers to care and they, like the Berlin Wall, should come down.

Those do-gooders and foundations should realize that they could have a strong partner in organized dentistry if they concentrate on oral and health education, as well as on bringing down barriers rather than erecting them or creating a whole layer of subpar providers, which will displace our members and undermine our population's health, welfare and safety, especially in minority and heavily populated ethnic, urban areas.

We are a caring and generous lot, but sometimes we care more for those outside our borders than those within. That, my friends, has to change. Let us take care of our own and those who need it most, then spread our wealth and benevolence to the rest of the world.

Other organizations started seeing it our way. Our white paper is still the standard used and copied and we don't mind. From the comments, articles, and notes coming out of the ADA and from Dr. Gist, the position of our two organizations is close to being reconciled and hopefully will be soon.

We did not and will never waver or relinquish our leadership role in the defense of our members and all general dentists to practice unencumbered by any rules or regulations thrust upon them by other entities, professional or otherwise. Our success in practice advocacy, in

government relations advocacy, and in professional relations advocacy were numerous this past year thanks to chairs like MB, JB, and CB (Mike Bromberg, Joe Battaglia, and Carter Brown).

We not only should cherish our wins, but learn how to make proper use of our victories—no matter who claims the credit—as long as dentistry and our members are the winners.

To do all that does not fall on the shoulders of a select few—be it headquarters, staff, officers, or Board members—but on the shoulders of each and every one of you, our leaders, and on the shoulders of every member in every corner of our regions. It is a collaborative effort among all those who belong, all those who care, and all those who want to sustain this Academy and nurture it for years to come.

Give of yourself, your experience, your knowledge, your passion and yes, your resources.

Educate and guide those fledglings and young graduates. Make them understand that the future of dentistry—their future—depends on the choices they make and the stance they take now. If we cannot always build our future for our youth, then we must build our youth for our future.

Stand tall, sound your views, and constructively act to right what you perceive to be wrong. That is loyalty. That is courage. That is commitment. That is conviction. That is devotion. That is what you should expect out of yourself, out of your colleagues, out of your Board, and your officers. And that is exactly what this Academy deserves and expects out of you, because that is the right thing to do—nothing more, nothing less.

Your staff, your Executive Committee, and your Board are all tireless in serving and in planning all this and need your support. Ultimately it is your duty; it is the duty of this House to ensure the propagation and the protection of the principles of this Academy and its existence. It all rests with you.

I stepped on the shores of this land a poor émigré 43 years ago to the day. Thanks to you, my AGD family, I consider myself the luckiest and the richest man in the world for bestowing on me this honor and this priceless trust of being your president.

So stay thirsty, my friends; thirsty for excellence, thirsty for knowledge, thirsty for learning. Anyone who stops learning is old, whether at 20 or 80.

Finally, I want to thank my family, my friends, and my staff for putting up with my hectic schedule. And for Maggie, my wife of 32 years, I will repeat what I said last year. There are no words in my vocabulary or in any dictionary to express or define my feeling. It is beyond love, beyond gratitude, beyond appreciation, and beyond devotion. I am the product of your making, your shaping, and your nurturing. I am a believer in destiny. You are my destiny.

Thank you all, and may God bless you, may God bless this Academy, and may God bless this land.