The physician advocate’s journey isn’t a marathon, outgoing AMA President Jack Resneck Jr., MD, said in his final remarks to the assembled AMA House of Delegates while holding the highest office in organized medicine. Marathons, Dr. Resneck said, have finish lines. The tireless work of improving the health of the nation and bettering the profession of medicine for today’s doctors and tomorrow’s physicians is unending.

“In our own professional tradition, the work to preserve our core values, and the health of our patients, is itself the enduring common cause that binds us,” said Dr. Resneck in his address at the opening session of the 2023 AMA Annual Meeting.

“We are more resolute in our work because of the challenges and existential threats to our profession and to our patients. Even when there are temporary setbacks, our common cause is to speak out for, and to advance our flame, our ethical values, and our common purpose—that is what keeps us going.”

Days before his term as the AMA’s 177th president comes to a close, Dr. Resneck offered that the collective efforts of physicians to fight on behalf of their profession and their patients more closely resemble the tradition of carrying the Olympic torch than they do any foot race.

“It’s about persevering with unyielding resolve,” said Dr. Resneck, a dermatologist from the San Francisco Bay Area. “The challenges that threaten the torch may change, but the larger mission—it does not.”

“Real threats” to physicians
Dr. Resneck highlighted a political climate that is putting physicians in a precarious position. Recently enacted Medicare physician payment cuts, which left the AMA President “appalled,” topped the list of challenges organized medicine must confront.

“Practices are on the brink. Our workforce is at risk. Access to care stands in the balance. We absolutely must—must—tie future Medicare payments to inflation, and we’re readying a major national campaign to finally achieve congressional action,” Dr. Resneck said to applause from the House of Delegates.

Meanwhile, divisive political rhetoric and policy on abortion and transgender adolescents effectively takes medical decisions away from patients and physicians. Also discouraging is the lack of progress in addressing the public health crisis of firearm violence in the U.S.

As one of the most powerful voices in the physician community, Dr. Resneck has raised his voice on these issues in the news media and directly with lawmakers and policymakers, and he’s come away with cause for optimism.

“There are more people who agree with us than those who do not,” Dr. Resneck said, to more applause from delegates. “Are there different ideologies around solving the challenges we face? Yes. Are there different strategies for achieving our goals? Of course.

“But, the truth is, most physicians and our patients are proud to see the AMA fighting for its policies and values.”

A path toward recovery

Dr. Resneck touted the progress achieved related to the AMA Recovery Plan for America’s Physicians.

Among the key victories in these arenas, AMA advocacy efforts have:

- Helped lead to a bill introduced in Congress that ties the Medicare physician payment schedule to the Medicare Economic Index.
- Played a key role in the passage legislation to extend Medicare telehealth coverage.
Helped protect patients from inappropriate scope-of-practice expansions that threatened safety more than 50 times in 2023, by partnering with state medical and national specialty societies.

- Constraining prior authorization across numerous states and advocating, successfully, for the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services to do the same in Medicare Advantage plans.

- Helping to create confidential wellness programs for physicians.

The past year has also seen progress on a number of additional AMA priorities, such as the opioid epidemic—with the FDA making naloxone available over the counter—and protecting patient data in the age of AI.

**The work ahead**

Looking over the assembled members of the AMA House of Delegates—a ballroom of nearly 700 torchbearers for righteous physician causes—Dr. Resneck said there was much work left to be done.

Top of the list is protecting the profession for the next generation, which is paramount in light of data that only 57% of today’s physicians would choose a career in medicine again if they were allowed a do-over.

“I hear this concern in the voices of medical students, residents, and even young physicians when they ask me ‘Am I going to be okay? Have I made the right career choice?’” Dr. Resneck said. Dr. Resneck said he usually approaches these conversations with assurances that they have indeed made the right choice. He follows that up with a call to act—time is of the essence.

“We have enormous privilege to do this work,” Dr. Resneck said. “We share a love for what we do—to help, to cure, to listen, to solve, to heal, to lead. And we have a responsibility to our patients and to the health of this nation.

“Our profession is counting on us to get this right,” he said. “Our patients are depending on us to continue this fight. We will not let them down.”

Read about the other highlights from the 2023 AMA Annual Meeting.