

Immediate Past President Susan R. Bailey, MD, address at the June 2021 Special Meeting

AMA Immediate Past President Susan R. Bailey, MD

In an address at the House of Delegates at the American Medical Association (AMA) June Special Meeting, AMA President Susan Bailey, MD, shares the inspiration of leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic. [Download the complete transcript \(PDF\)](#).

The AMA and the legacy of leadership

Mister Speaker, officers, delegates, physician and student colleagues, distinguished guests ... it is a privilege to address you for the final time as AMA president.

Serving as your president has been the honor of my professional life ... and I thank you for the trust you have placed in me to carry the mantle of leadership for our organization in this historic ... and extremely challenging ... moment.

No one has shouldered more in this pandemic than our courageous colleagues on the front lines ... brave men and women from every state who have gone above and beyond in service to their patients and communities.

You will remain in our hearts and in our thoughts long after this pandemic is over.

I began my presidency talking about the hero's journey that we travel as physicians ... beginning with the spark of inspiration to choose medicine ... and continuing, with the help of a mentor, through hardship and struggle before emerging a stronger and more resilient leader.

COVID-19 has presented us with the ultimate test. And though the pandemic will continue for some time, I am more confident than ever that our physician community will emerge from it stronger, wiser and more resilient than before ... and that in facing these challenges we have inspired countless others, doctors we may never know, to choose medicine and begin journeys of their own.

To travel the hero's journey is to honor and emulate all those who came before ... men and women of great courage and selflessness who broke barriers so that others could follow.

I told you last June that my heroes had always been doctors, but today I would like to tell you about another hero whose journey has influenced my own.

I never met General James Earl Rudder, a decorated war hero and rancher from a tiny Texas town most people have never heard of.

But his story is one of incredible bravery, both on the battlefield and off ... and through his struggle in the face of bitter opposition, Rudder's journey profoundly influenced my own ... ultimately, paving the way for me to become AMA president.

Earl Rudder was a second lieutenant in the Army Reserves while a student at Texas A&M in the early 1930s. But he so impressed his commanding officers that by the time war had erupted in Europe a decade later he was leading a battalion of highly specialized Army Rangers.

On June 6, 1944 ... D-Day ... Rudder, just 34 years old, led his Ranger battalion onto the beaches at Normandy and up the 100-foot vertical cliffs at Pointe du Hoc under heavy German fire.

His unit suffered major casualties, and Rudder himself was severely injured but survived and later went on to lead the 109th Infantry Regiment in the Battle of the Bulge.

After the war, Rudder returned to Texas but a quiet life on his family's ranch was not in the cards.

He was appointed to restore order and restore public trust in the scandal ridden Veterans Land Board ... his reputation for integrity and selfless service had followed him home. Soon after he accepted an offer to become vice president of Texas A&M University.

Two years later, Rudder was named president of the university at a time of rapid societal change. Until then, Texas A&M was largely an agriculture and military school, and was virtually all male. Women could attend some classes but could not receive a degree.

But Rudder understood, instinctively, that the university needed to change to become a world class academic power, and he fought a very public battle, against hostile foes, to diversify Texas A&M's student body, including the admission of women as full-time students.

Only a decade later, I was the first woman accepted to Texas A&M's College of Medicine, part of a charter class that is, in part, credit to one man's incredible courage and his journey. My graduation, in fact, fell on the 37th anniversary of Rudder's charge into Normandy.

He was a hero in every sense of the word and inspired me, as well as hundreds of thousands of other students.

I mention him now because it is impossible to know whose lives we touch when we stand up for what's right.

The same can be said for our work together at the AMA and the countless people we inspire through our leadership, our advocacy and our action.

We inspire others when we fight to advance telemedicine as a lifeline for patients and physician practices crippled by the severe economic impact of this pandemic.

Because of our work, physicians had the resources, support and confidence to implement remote care into their practices and give patients to access these services no matter where they lived.

We inspire others when we call attention to the impact of racism and social injustice on people of color ... and when we help build communities to address the root causes of health inequities.

We inspire others when we fight for the financial support to keep struggling practices afloat, securing billions in aid during this pandemic ...

... and when we push to expand access to meaningful and affordable health coverage by championing enrollment subsidies and defending against cuts to the Affordable Care Act in Congress and the courts.

We inspire others when we are successful in removing administrative burdens that interfere with patient care ... and when we fight for greater transparency across health care, giving physicians access leading experts who will answer their most urgent questions.

We inspire others when we deliver the tools and resources they desperately need in a health crisis like COVID-19

... when we stand up for science, evidence and data ...

... when we work to build confidence in safe and effective COVID vaccines ...

... and when we are a credible and reliable source for information in a time of rampant misinformation.

We inspire others when we protect our patients from unanticipated medical bills and the devastating financial loss that can result from a health emergency ...

... when we create resources and training to stem the rise in physicians burnout ... when we advocate for common sense solutions to gun violence and ending our nation's drug overdose epidemic.

And we inspire others when we work in close coordination with our Federation partners at the state and local levels, and across every specialty, who are as invaluable to physicians, policy makers and the public in their local communities as we were on a national scale.

At the AMA ... particularly after such a difficult year ... we know that physicians need more than just our support ... we need the AMA's power and our influence to accomplish what we cannot possibly do on our own.

To make our jobs a little easier.

To remove the common pain points that interfere with patient care.

To make our health system more accessible and more equitable for all people.

To protect the patient-physician relationship from interference or outside influence.

This is the legacy of the AMA ... and of organized medicine.

Only organized medicine can do this work.

Only we can deliver what physicians and patients most need in a crisis.

My friends and colleagues, COVID-19 is a watershed moment in history.

It is both an epic tragedy and, at the same time, one of the greatest scientific achievements in our lifetimes.

How we emerge from this pandemic will say a lot about where we go from here. The values we hold. The priorities we fight for.

Through struggle and triumph, we have lit the way for a better AMA ... a better health system ... and a stronger, healthier nation.

More importantly, we have inspired a whole new generation of young students to pursue medicine, and to become the physician leaders they are meant to be.

To carry the work of the AMA forward.



They are the legacy of this moment ... and they are the most valuable gift to medicine we could possibly leave.

Thank you.