

**2026 AMA Annual Meeting
Address to the House of Delegates**

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Leading with Purpose

Madam Speaker, Dr. Vice Speaker, members of the Board, delegates, colleagues, and guests — it is an honor to address this House of Delegates one final time as AMA president.

At Interim in November, I told you I've been keeping a running count of how many days I have left in this role. Back then, it was 204.

Today, it is four

Don't get me wrong! I haven't been counting because I wanted this work to end — although it certainly has been intense at times.

I have been counting because this role is a privilege. And because I wanted to make the most of every single day with this platform.

I simply do not want to waste one moment of the time I have left.

Tonight, I want to talk about something that is close to my heart, and mind, these days — as I suspect it is for many people who have faced a difficult diagnosis.

Living a life of purpose.

As you all know, I began my presidency last June during a period of profound uncertainty.

Not only about my own health, but uncertainty across a health care system that is changing rapidly around us — creating new pressures, new questions, and new responsibilities for physicians and patients alike.

Through all of it, I have been deeply grateful for the AMA — and the sense of purpose I have found in our work.

The purpose to speak honestly about what is broken in health care — from the perspective of both physician and patient.

The purpose to stand up for science, public health, and truth when they are challenged.

The purpose to bring people together — not simply to debate problems, but to solve them.

And the purpose to tell our story ... because the work of the AMA and organized medicine matters deeply for our patients.

We lead with purpose.

Take it from me, you don't need a life-altering diagnosis to find your purpose.

Purpose is all around us – in our patients, in our communities, in the experiences that energize us and push us to make things better.

I have traveled the country, and the world, as AMA president in the past year, but my view of health care remains grounded in what I see in Nita's and my own practice in Flint, Michigan.

Because policy decisions made in Washington or in state capitals aren't abstract – they show up in real, tangible ways in our patients' lives.

Whether they can find a physician when they need one.

Whether they can afford their medication.

You've heard me speak often about my hometown – a proud Rust Belt city, a city with tenacity, but one that knows all too well what happens when systems meant to protect people fall short.

When policymakers weaken programs that people rely on for care, the consequences are felt first and most deeply in communities that are already struggling to overcome barriers to health and opportunity.

That's why I am proud that our AMA has been a consistent and leading voice in opposing the Medicaid cuts that were passed into law last summer.

In cities like Flint and across this country, access to care isn't theoretical. It's everything.

And we must protect it at all costs!

That is our duty as doctors ... as leaders.

When you spend as much time on the road and in your car as I do, you start to notice things.

The highways leading in and out of Flint are littered with billboards paid for by large hospitals promoting their latest in acute care.

Greatest place for a hip replacement.

Greatest place for bariatric surgery.

Greatest place for hernias.

Now, these services are great if your health needs are specific to these issues.

But what about the health needs of most people?

I wish I would see billboards – maybe even from the AMA – broadcasting what we know is essential for good health – early screenings, healthy foods, timely appointments – the true building blocks of a thriving community.

Our country is the best in the world when it comes to treating patients that have narrow, acute health challenges.

But if we want to live healthier lives and lower the cost of care, preventing disease and stopping its progress are essential.

It's why I chose to pursue lifestyle medicine certification, which has fundamentally changed how I talk with my patients.

I'll ask them: What kinds of exercise do you enjoy?

How much sleep are you getting?

These questions are just as relevant as questions about joint pain or sinus pressure because the answers tell a complete story about a person's health.

This is why the AMA has renewed its focus on lifestyle in the past year – championing whole-body health through education, advocacy, physician engagement and evidence-based strategies that help patients make meaningful changes in their lives to improve outcomes.

Our purpose, as physicians, is to leave things better than we found it.

That means helping build a system that values prevention as much as treatment - and ensuring physicians have the tools, the training, and the support to make that vision a reality.

It also means pushing back against efforts to politicize medical care and undermine science.

When trust is weakened, every diagnosis becomes harder, every treatment more difficult, and every patient is put at greater risk.

Over the past year, the AMA has used our voice to confront misinformation, repair public trust, and support physicians navigating increasingly difficult conversations with our patients every day.

Trust is foundational in medicine.

And at a time when so many voices are competing for attention and influence, we will make sure that physicians remain the most trusted voices in health care.

But trust alone is not enough.

Physicians need a system that supports our ability to care for our patients. And that simply is not the reality today.

We have a Medicare payment system that no longer reflects the realities of practicing medicine, we are mired in prior authorization battles, and inundated with one administrative hassle after another.

And when physicians are exhausted, when practices are struggling, when so many of our colleagues are questioning how long they can continue, it affects us physically, mentally, and morally,

These are serious headwinds.

But confronting them is the work of the AMA. It is the reason we are here.

Not to accept a system that falls short – but to build a better one.

This is why, despite the challenges, I am optimistic about medicine's future.

Even in a deeply divided Washington, the AMA has shown us that progress is possible.

Our advocacy secured a bipartisan funding package that includes several reforms that are steppingstones to a better system.

This includes telehealth, diabetes prevention, and physician well-being.

It includes important protections like making sure that Medicare Advantage plans tell the truth about who is actually in their network and making sure PBMs have greater accountability.

And just last week, AMA won improvements in the No Surprises Act's dispute resolution process – resulting in clearer guidance, greater flexibility and stronger transparency, benefitting physicians and ultimately our patients.

These victories did not happen overnight. They are the result of our hard work, our sustained advocacy and strong physician engagement over many years.

Progress is seldom quick or easy.

But the lesson is clear: When the AMA shows up and physicians lead, medicine moves forward.

For the betterment of patients and the profession.

But our ability to lead depends on something fundamental: Physicians choosing to be part of this work.

AMA membership is the highest it's been in decades – surpassing 320,000.

And yet we still have far too many physicians who benefit from the work of the AMA ... but remain disconnected from it.

Every day, I get emails from physicians who want me or the AMA to solve some problem they have.

I respond with a polite thank you and then share exactly what the AMA is doing on that issue. And I always end with a question: are you an AMA member?

And if they're right in front of me I ask them to scan this QR code I wear in my suit.

Because apathy is not ok. The challenges we face are too important for us to sit on the sidelines.

If we want a stronger voice for physicians, we need more physicians at the table.

This is the message I deliver in just about every talk I give across the country. And I'm always surprised by the response.

Many physicians who were skeptical of the AMA — or simply unaware of the scope of our work — come up to me afterward and said: *I didn't realize the AMA was doing all of this.*

And most of them join us.

Because when physicians understand the impact of this organization ... they want to be part of it.

That is progress.

But we aren't at the finish line.

We have to keep telling our story every chance that we get.

Whether we're in large hospitals, in group practices, or small independent ones like Nita and me.

There is far more that connects us than divides us.

Our voice is stronger – and our impact greater – when we stand united.

While I only have a few days left as your president, I am proud of what we have accomplished together this past year – and the fight that we are in.

That purpose has sustained me.

But not too much pride though, because the Catholic School I went to taught me: Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth.

In many ways, carrying the AMA's message all over the country became part of my recovery.

After surgery, there were weeks when I struggled to do things I had always taken for granted. There was a time when I couldn't even read a speech from a piece of paper.

So me being able to think, write, speak, and engage again felt like a gift.

Each assignment. Each speech. Each opportunity to learn, contribute, and push myself a little further became part of my healing process.

The work you asked me to do as president gave me purpose. And that purpose helped me recover.

Before long I found myself energized, even at home as I packed my bags for my next trip somewhere

And, as many of you know, I can be a little goofy.

On those rare evenings at home when I had finished in the office or the operating room, I'd hang out with friends – including some hip hop artist friends of mine – and well...I'll just show ya...

(video clip)

For those who want to see the entire video, I'll post it later tonight.

Sometimes advocacy means stepping outside of your comfort zone – and taking a new approach to delivering the same old message.

And just like the movie I did in India, this song proves, yet again, that I am a no-hit wonder.

But life is meant to be fun, to be fulfilling, and because of you – and this work we are privileged to do – mine is.

Of course, nobody does this alone, and I could not have gotten through the last year without the support of my incredible wife Nita, and my sons Deven and Nikhil, who are with us tonight.

Support through my recovery and tolerance of my short fuse in a busy year – yes I was high maintenance in a big way, but they tolerated every single minute of it

And we will always be grateful for the kindness of our parents.

And for the inspiration I've gotten from the generation of physicians before me like my mom and dad

At a time when so much in this country feels divided, the AMA continues to demonstrate something important: physicians can still come together. We can debate. We can listen. We can work hard to find common ground. And we can move forward, united.

That is the strength of this House.

This is our purpose.

And throughout this wonderful and challenging year, our shared purpose stayed with me.

This House stayed with me.

You reminded me ... that when physicians stand together, we are the most powerful force for good in medicine.

I will carry this experience with me – always.

Because our responsibility does not end here.

In many ways, it is just beginning.

Let us move forward together – with unity and with purpose.

Thank you for your trust.

Your friendship.

And the extraordinary honor of serving as your president.

Thank you for giving me purpose.

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