

# CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE



JAMES D. EDWARDS, DC

“More regulatory, legal, and legislative victories were achieved in the last four years than in the first 104 years of our history combined!”

## Scoring Touchdowns from the Five-Yard Line

By the time you read this, my second and final term as chairman of the ACA board of governors will have ended. My last chairman's column will take a proud look back and give my personal insights about what it is like to serve in this most important office.

Being the chief executive officer of the largest chiropractic association in the world is the most powerful position in the chiropractic profession. Although the ACA chairman does not have the power to act unilaterally or dictate policy, nothing important happens that affects chiropractic without the chairman knowing about it within minutes—and having the opportunity to offer input. Past ACA chairman Dr. Kerwin Winkler once told me that that is what he missed most about leaving the job—and I know that is what I will also miss the most.

What will I miss the least? Two hundred daily e-mails and 25 phone calls. And I will also not miss skycaps knowing me by name!

I leave the job extremely satisfied. Four years ago, when I was a candidate for the executive committee, I was asked about my vision for the ACA and this profession. I recently ran across my written replies to that question and was pleasantly surprised and proud of the progress that has been made on the multiple fronts I addressed. I want to share the comments I submitted:

*“In my opinion, chiropractic's first century will be remembered as the ‘100 Year War.’ This profession not only fought (and contin-*

*ues to fight) the AMA, it fought (and continues to fight) a civil war among its own practitioners and associations. We continue to circle the wagons and shoot inward and that simply must stop if we are ever going to mature as a profession.*

*“It is time for the leadership of this profession to say ‘enough is enough’ and take bold steps to stop the infighting. We must accentuate what we agree on, rather than the small things that divide us. And it's time for the leadership to do the right thing for the profession, without regard to political considerations.*

*“One word describes what this profession needs: UNITY. I would like to outline my vision of where unity must occur and a few of the action steps that need to be taken.”*

I outlined the need for “internal unity” so our leaders could become a “team” working for the same goals. That has most certainly occurred. ACA leaders debate and often disagree on important issues, but it is done with professionalism, and at the end of the day, friendships and mutual respect remain intact.

I then discussed the importance of building bridges to state associations to create “state unity.” I recommended that the ACA become a legislative and legal resource depository for them. That has most certainly occurred. Today, the ACA staff and legal counsel are viewed as the premier experts on a variety of subjects including insurance relations, regulatory interpretation, legislative strategy, model bills, and legal issues. State associations across the country know that our assistance is only a phone call away and take advantage of our ACA expertise and experience on a daily basis.

I then stressed the need for “member unity” and the importance of correcting inaccurate statements every time they surface in the tabloid press. To make sure the ACA member in the field has correct information, I recommended that “ready to print” articles be sent to every state association journal each month and

that *ACA Today* be distributed to every doctor of chiropractic in the United States. Both of those goals were accomplished. As a result, members and non-members know what the ACA stands for. The purveyors of misinformation now have a much tougher time getting doctors to believe their fabricated stories.

My final and most important vision was “professional unity” and the absolute need for the ACA and ICA to unify into one organization. I have repeatedly pointed out that if the ACA and ICA can agree on language for the Alliance publications, and if both organizations can endorse the ACC Paradigm, then there is much more that unites than divides us. In that document, I concluded by stating, *“When the window opens again, the ACA must take the lead to ensure that the opportunity is immediately seized and thoroughly explored. The profession expects and deserves no less.”* With new leadership at the ICA, that predicted “window of opportunity” has finally opened and unity could and should finally become a reality.

On Sept. 1, 2001, after two years on the executive committee, I became the 23<sup>rd</sup> ACA chairman of the board of governors. I knew I had my work cut out for me and that it would be an eventful year for me personally. I had no idea how eventful it would be for the United States of America, however, and the world. Ten days after I took office as chairman, the world was changed forever when the tragedy of 9-11 occurred. I am proud to say that the ACA never blinked. Even though friends and loved ones warned ACA leaders not to get on an airplane for any reason, ACA did its part and did not yield to terrorism. Not one single event was canceled. In fact, on Friday, Sept. 14, I began my chair-

manship by boarding one of the very first airplanes allowed to fly. I became one of the first persons to see our armed forces guarding airports. It became commonplace, but I will never forget how surprised (and glad) I was to see uniformed members of the military carrying assault rifles in airports to ensure the safety of traveling Americans.

The goal of my chairmanship was simple—continue the policies and vision of past chairman Dr. J. Michael Flynn. Even though many of the biggest victories in our history occurred during the last two years on “my watch,” it was Dr. Flynn’s leadership that got the ball down to the five-yard line on so many projects. Fifty years from now when historians write the history of chiropractic at the turn of the century (1999-2003) and mention ACA leaders, I believe they will have trouble separating the Flynn-Edwards chairmanships since there was such continuity of purpose and efforts, and because we served as each other’s trusted adviser and chief assistant.

Chiropractic “touchdowns” scored by the ACA team have been many. In fact, more regulatory, legal, and legislative victories were achieved in the last four years than in the first 104 years of our history combined!

Beginning with the signing by President Clinton of ACA-sponsored legislation making chiropractic a permanent benefit for our men and women in uniform, to President Bush signing ACA-sponsored legislation making chiropractic a permanent benefit for our nation’s veterans, to President Bush signing ACA-sponsored legislation making DCs eligible to have their student loans paid off, to Senate passage of a bill that we hope will lead to Medicare reimbursement for x-rays, examinations, and therapy, to getting a doc-

tor of chiropractic appointed to the Attending Physician’s Office to treat members of Congress onsite, to having two cabinet members speak at NCLC, to filing a lawsuit against the federal government that resulted in the HHS secretary’s ruling that PTs cannot deliver subluxation care under Medicare, to filing a federal lawsuit against the Blues that led to expanded chiropractic reimbursement for physical therapy services for federal employees, it truly has been an exhilarating time to serve at the helm of this great profession. Hardly a week has gone by that something did not happen that was positive for doctors of chiropractic, our practices, and our patients!

History shows that most past ACA chairmen remain very active after leaving office. Prime examples include Drs. Shelby Elliott, Lou Sportelli, J. Michael Flynn, Edward Maurer, Lowry Morton, Robert Jackson, Harry Kieffer, Van Mericas, and Kerwin Winkler, all of whom continued to serve this profession in other important roles. This former chairman will follow their lead by continuing to serve this profession in areas where my experience will benefit the profession.

I leave the chairmanship with three last thoughts—which I have incorporated into many of my speeches and articles over the past four years.

In all of recorded history, there has never been a better time to be alive. We have unbelievable conveniences, beautiful homes, good work conditions, and plenty of food. And there has never been a better place to live than the United States of America. Sure, we have our problems, but no other country today can hold a candle to the U.S.A. And as doctors of chiropractic, we have one huge, additional advantage. Of all the professions you could serve in, there is none better

than chiropractic. We are truly blessed to be able to have the skills and the opportunity to help people regain their health naturally without harmful drugs and surgery. So we, as American doctors of chiropractic today, live in the greatest time, live in the greatest country, and serve in the greatest profession. It just doesn't get any better than this.

Second, we must never forget the sacrifices made by our early pioneers who were willing to go to jail to ensure that chiropractic survived. We must also remember that chiropractic doesn't belong to any one of us. Chiropractic belongs to humanity, and we are only its caretakers for this particular generation. What we do with it—how we preserve, defend, and protect it—will affect many generations to come. It is now our "watch." And it's our pri-

mary responsibility to pass chiropractic on to the next generation better and stronger than it was when we received it. Years from now when we look back at our professional careers, I believe that is the only "yardstick" that will matter.

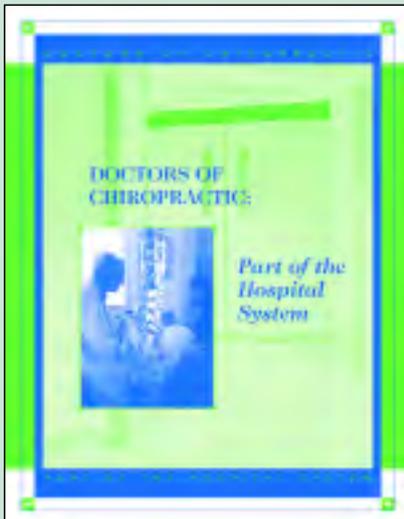
Finally, I remain totally and completely convinced that there is no greater need today than professional unity. Call it affiliation, unification, merger—whatever you want. But it is past time for the ICA and ACA to merge and begin speaking to policymakers and legislators with one strong voice and stop the needless duplication of services. Just as I have used every opportunity to discuss this need over the past four years, I will steadfastly continue those efforts during my last two years on the board of governors and

fully expect this dream to become a reality.

Words cannot express my gratitude for the confidence placed in me by the Kansas ACA members who elected me to the House of Delegates in 1996, by the District VI delegates who elected me district governor, and by the ACA board of governors who elected me to the executive committee and then chairman of the board. I am humbled to have had the opportunity to serve the chiropractic profession as ACA chairman and am grateful that my tenure fortuitously coincided with the zenith of this profession—to date. 

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