

Scoring Touchdowns From the 5-Yard Line!

By James Edwards, DC

By the time you read this, my second and final term as chairman of the ACA Board of Governors will have ended. As my tenure comes to a close, I'd like to take a proud look back and give some "insider's insights" about what it's like to serve in this most important office.

Being the chief executive officer of the largest chiropractic association in the world is, without question, the most powerful position in the chiropractic profession. Although the chairman does not have the power to act unilaterally or dictate what should or should not be done, I can tell you that nothing happens within chiropractic, or that affects chiropractic, without my knowing about it within minutes - and nothing happens without my opportunity to offer input. Past ACA Chairman Dr. Kerwin Winkler once told me the latter 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 e-mails and 25 phone calls daily. I will also not miss skycaps knowing me by name!

I must admit that I leave the job extremely satisfied. Four years ago, when I was a candidate for the ACA Executive Committee, I was asked about my vision for the future. I recently ran across my written reply to that question and was pleasantly surprised with, and extremely proud of, the progress that has been made on multiple fronts. Here is the preamble to my response:

In my opinion, chiropractic's first century (or so) will be remembered as the "100-Year War." This profession not only fought (and continues 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. It's time for the leadership of this profession to accentuate what we agree upon, 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 how they might be affected politically.

In the final analysis, one word describes what this profession needs ... **unity**.

My "platform" then outlined the unity steps that needed to be taken on multiple fronts, including "internal unity" within the ACA leadership; "state unity" with state chiropractic associations; "member unity" by keeping doctors in the field informed and responding to untruthful attacks; and "professional unity" between the ICA and ACA.

In September 2001, after serving two years on the Executive Committee, I became the 23rd person to serve as the 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. However, I had no idea how eventful it would be for the United States of America and the world. Ten days after taking office as chairman, the world was changed forever when the Sept. 11 tragedy occurred.

I am proud to say that the ACA never blinked. Even though friends and loved ones warned me not to get on an airplane for any reason, I am very proud to say the ACA did its part and did not yield to terrorism. Not one single event was canceled. In fact, just three days later, I was on one of the very first airplanes allowed to take off; I became one of the first people in this country to see our armed forces guarding airports. Yes, 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. That's how my chairmanship began.

The goal of my chairmanship was simple - continue the policies and vision of Past Chairman Dr. J. Michael Flynn. Even though many of our biggest victories occurred during the last two years on my "watch," it was Dr. Flynn's leadership that got the ball down to the 5-yard line on so many projects. Fifty years from now, if and when historians write the history of chiropractic at the turn of this millennium, I believe they will have trouble separating the Flynn-Edwards chairmanships, since there was such a continuity of purpose and efforts, and since we served as each other's trusted advisor and chief assistant.

And when it comes to chiropractic "touchdowns" accomplished by the ACA team, there have

been so very many. In fact, **more regulatory, legal and legislative victories have been achieved in the last four years than in the first 104 years of our history combined!**

From President Clinton signing 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 will hopefully lead to Medicare reimbursement for X-rays, examinations and therapy; to getting a doctor of chiropractic appointed to the Attending Physicians Office to treat members of Congress on-site; to having two cabinet members speak at the National Chiropractic Legislative Conference: to filing a lawsuit against the federal government that resulted in the HHS Secretary 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. It is not an exaggeration to say that hardly a week has gone by in which something did not happen that was positive for doctors of chiropractic, our practices and our patients!

And with regard to my vision for the profession from four years ago, I am proud to say those missions were most definitely accomplished. The ACA leadership team has never been closer. State associations now view the ACA as the premier resource for information on insurance relations; regulatory interpretation; legislative strategy; model bills; and legal issues. Purveyors of misinformation now have a much tougher time getting doctors to believe their fabricated stories, and with the new ICA leadership change, a merger of the ICA and ACA may indeed become a reality!

I leave the chairmanship with three last thoughts, which I have incorporated in many of the speeches I have given, and most of the articles I have written during the last four years.

First, in all of recorded history, there has never been a better time to be alive. We have unbelievable conveniences, beautiful homes, good working conditions and plenty of food. And in all of recorded history, there has never been a better place to live in than the United States of America. Sure, we have our problems, but no other country today - or in all of recorded history - can hold a candle to this country. 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 have the skills and the opportunity to help

people regain their health naturally, without the use of harmful drugs and surgery. As American doctors of chiropractic, we live in the greatest time and the greatest country, and serve in the greatest profession in all of recorded history. I submit to you that 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 chiropractor. It never has, and it never will. Chiropractic belongs to humanity, and we are only the caretakers of it for this particular generation. What we do with it; how we preserve it; how we defend it; and how we protect it, will affect many generations to come. It is now our "watch" and our primary responsibility is to take chiropractic and pass it 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 this is the only "yardstick" that will matter.

And finally, I remain totally and completely convinced that there is no greater need today than for professional unity. Call it affiliation, unification, a merger - whatever you want. The fact remains that it is past time for the ICA and ACA to merge and begin speaking to policy-makers and legislators with one strong voice, and to stop the needless duplication of services. Just as I have used every opportunity to discuss this need over the last four years, I will continue steadfastly those efforts during my remaining years on the Board of Governors. And I must tell you, I fully expect this dream to become a reality.

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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