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# **President's Incoming Address to the 2004 House of Delegates**

## **Friday, June 25, 2004**

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**32<sup>nd</sup> President**

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The last two years have been an incredible journey for me personally and for all of you. We have made some remarkable progress. We have met some remarkable challenges. This house, in the last two years has done an incredible amount of work. We have adopted new bylaws. We have taken on new challenges. We have agreed to take risks together. And we agreed today in this house to face an external challenge the likes of which we have not faced in many, many years.

The challenge to this house, I believe, is to see and address the big picture – to fly up to the ten thousand feet level and higher. It is a challenge that many of us don't have every day as we look at the details of taking care of our patients. The details are so important because their lives depend on us doing those details well.

When we come to this house, when we serve on our state boards, when we serve on our national boards, we are challenged to think broadly. We are challenged to look at big pictures, big concepts and big visions. So the challenge for us, I think, is to be able to move smoothly between the two. To focus on the details when the details are critical, and to see and think and work with the big picture as it advances our profession into the future.

The board of directors by its very nature must every day traverse between the two. But our primary job as the board and as the leaders of this association is to stay in the big picture, to see the vision, to think beyond today, and to try to position ourselves for next year and the year after and the year after that. And the challenge is – and you will forgive me, I hope, for the language. But when you're up to your ass in alligators it's difficult to remember that the primary objective is to drain the swamp.

Think about that for a minute.

And one could argue that we are up to our gluteus maximus in alligators these days. And as we deal with the alligators, it's also important to remember the objective. The objective is a balanced perspective of nursing for the future. The objective is a balanced understanding of the tools and the skills that are available to us across the country at varying degrees and at varying times.

The challenge to us is to recognize those places in which certain tools work well and support them; and then, to turn around and support other tools in other places. And let me be blunt. I'm

talking about using the skills and the tools of labor and using the skills and the tools of workplace advocacy.

We have not done a good job, my friends, of respecting those tools. We must do better than we have in the past if we are to do well. We have a challenge externally that I believe is bigger than any internal issue, and I urge us from the very depth of my being that we attack the issue head on, we make it very clear that the American Nurses Association stands and speaks for every nurse in this country regardless of specialty, regardless of geography, regardless of color, regardless of race, regardless of sexual persuasion, regardless of religion, regardless.

That makes our job bigger than any other nursing association in this country. That makes our challenges bigger than any other nursing association in this country. The pressures that we have because of our mission are much broader. The challenges for us, I think, are to find way to respect and recognize and support all that is in this association, all the members, all the tools, all the perspectives, all the political persuasions. We have a very big job to do. As our country becomes more polarized and people go to the extremes of that polarization, what always holds a country or an organization together is the ability to come to the middle and to see the middle as the place in which we can do the work.

If we follow the lead that is in the country that will not happen very soon. We cannot afford to allow the extremes in this continuum to take us down. We must move to the middle together. There is plenty of room there for all of us, for all of our issues, for all of our concerns, and, for all of our passions.

The next two years will be very telling for us. We are out of time to let this dangle out there. We are out of time. And so I commit to you that I will meet you in the middle. And I hope you come there.

Thank you all very much.