

Letter From The President

FINAL ARTICLE

BY CECIL BYKERK

AS I SIT DOWN to write my final Presidential article for *The Actuary*, my thoughts drift back over the last two years. It has been a very fast two years that have been filled with positive happenings along with a few challenging events.

Back in the spring of 2007 when I started my election campaign, my daughter, who was an actuarial student, now an FSA, asked me what she should tell her FSA colleagues when they asked why they should vote for me. During my many years as a volunteer, I had always aspired to one day serve as president of the Society of Actuaries—the ultimate volunteer position. I wanted to continue to give back to the profession that has given me so much. Many of you have heard me speak regarding how important volunteerism is to me. Once again, I reiterate that I have been blessed with having received as much or more in return. My daughter's question caused me to articulate some more specific goals for my presidency.

Those goals were/are to: 1) be a major contributor in the transition of our new Executive Director Greg Heidrich; 2) ensure a superior education system; 3) maintain the SOA as a worldwide leader in the actuarial profession; 4) grow and enhance our image; 5) promote the new CERA credential; 6) continue the cooperative efforts between the U.S. actuarial organizations and 7) use my diverse

skill, experience and knowledge to promote the Society of Actuaries and the actuarial profession as a mover and shaker in North America—especially the United States.

In a moment I will reflect on the strides we (note: we, not I) have made with those goals, but first I want to relate some thoughts on events over my two years as president-elect and president. The first event actually occurred around the time I found out that I was elected as president-elect. My oldest daughter, Andrea Christopherson, received her FSA at the FAC in Montreal in August 2007. It was a very proud moment for both my wife, Loree, and me. Ed Robbins, then SOA President, was gracious enough to invite me up to have my picture taken with him and my daughter. I had originally hoped that I would be president at the time my daughter received her diploma, but Ed had beaten me in the election two years before that.

Jumping forward to the following August, a less happy event took place. Loree had been suffering from upper back pains for several months. She was going back in to see the doctor who was most likely going to send her for physical therapy assuming some type of muscle pull. We discussed at the breakfast table—a long tradition in our house—that perhaps it would be smart to have a CT scan. She mentioned that to the doctor, who happens to have passed three actuarial exams

(that was his fallback in case he didn't get into medical school). He decided that was a good suggestion. Two days later she got a call from the doctor who informed her that she had a tumor in the upper right lobe of her lung. Initially the course of action seemed to be surgery. Following 10 days of various tests, however, a PET scan showed that she had a tiny tumor in her right adrenal gland. Biopsies showed that the lung tumor had metastasized to the adrenal gland. She had stage 4 lung cancer which is considered incurable. But her oncologist was very upbeat and said while it was stage 4, almost all of her other factors were very much in her favor. By the way, she has never smoked.

As we faced the upcoming initial three months of intravenous chemotherapy followed by two surgeries to remove the upper right lobe and the right adrenal gland, followed by another three months of intravenous chemotherapy, followed by a pill to be taken for two years (two months into that now), we discussed my upcoming presidency and the extra work and the travel involved. Knowing how much I had worked for this and looked forward to it, Loree indicated that she was fully supportive of me continuing on with the position. She said that she would try as much as possible to participate in the events where spouses are involved. Of course, I promised to be with her when it was important for me to be



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present. Generally speaking, I have been. A couple of times Andrea or our younger daughter Jeanie helped out, but for the most part, I have been there physically. It has to be said that I was mentally distracted on many occasions, but Loree has been incredibly understanding.

In addition, she maintained her full-time college teaching commitments, including being chair of the Political Science Department, with just one exception—being relieved from one class in the fall semester. She was with me and our daughters' families in Orlando in October for my installation. She was with me in Cyprus at the IAA meeting in November, coming back home by herself so that she could have a treatment. She was with me at the three NAAC meetings and the two spring SOA meetings that we have had during this time. Most recently, she was with me in Hong Kong and in Singapore for meetings with the insurance regulators, local actuarial schools and associations, the China Regional Committee, an FAC in Hong Kong, and the IAA meetings in Tallinn, Estonia in late May.

All this while, she has maintained an incredible attitude and encouraged me with respect to my SOA duties. At this point, she seems to be cancer free and the pills are a preventative. She still has some post surgical pain from the incisions, but she doesn't really complain about that. I am writing this because I feel that Loree has gone above and beyond for the benefit of the Society of Actuaries. I dedicate my year as president to her.

In the background of all these events, we have had a global economic meltdown. Our personal plans for retirement, just like almost everyone else we know, have been impacted. The SOA has been impacted

as well. We have had to hone our budget and pay particular attention to our meeting planning. Attendance is being impacted. Actuaries are being laid off or downsized. Major health care reform is looming that could change the work place for health actuaries in a significant way. As I have used in previous articles, we now have a new normal. We must adjust.

But back to the goals I mentioned earlier. I have gotten to know and work with Greg Heidrich who has more than 20 years experience working with the casualty actuarial profession through his former trade association employment. Greg hit the ground running two years ago and once in a while I have to tell him to take some time off. He has finally started to do a bit of that this summer. We continue to fine-tune our education system and hope to be able to give the fellowship exams twice a year in the near term future. We are looking at ways to better use our academic partners including the controversial (Future Education Methods) FEM. As I write this, nothing has been decided for certain regarding its adoption. First, we want to get our members' feedback, feedback based on the true facts of the proposal. Once we have that initial feedback, we will decide the next step.

The SOA continues to be a worldwide leader in the actuarial profession with a strong position and influence on the International Actuarial Association (IAA). In fact, I am currently slated to become president-elect of the IAA in 2010 and then president in 2011. Our efforts through the Marketing and Market Development Program have continued to pay big rewards through recognition of the profession. The CERA program now has nearly 500 credential holders. We continue to explore making the CERA a global credential by working with other actuarial organiza-

tions from around the world. The cooperation between the five U.S. actuarial organizations has never been better. We continue to discuss ways to eliminate duplication while recognizing the unique roles of each organization. Promoting the SOA as a mover and shaker in North America is not an easy thing to accomplish. But I believe we have made progress through some of the other goals discussed above. As a leader in the risk management business, particularly in light of the global financial situation, the SOA has positioned itself well.

I am humbled to have been your president this past year. I truly enjoyed it and hope that my work will serve the SOA members well in the future. Earlier I mentioned what "we" have accomplished because the support I have been given by staff and volunteers has been tremendous. Little would have been accomplished without that support. Finally, I want to thank all our friends and associates who have been especially supportive and caring regarding Loree and her illness. The outreach has been incredible. Thank you all so much. **A**

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