



# Farewell

## Gary C. Mohr

*ACA 106<sup>th</sup> Immediate Past President*

### General Session Speech

**B**y not having our 150<sup>th</sup> summer congress and now this winter conference being virtual, we have eliminated the need to march in to our general session to a song that has meaning for the event or is special to the president. As a result, Jim did not have to face the possibility of having to play Travis Tritt, and the song he performed, “Its a Great Day to Be Alive.” As you have observed over time including today, I open every speech with this phrase. In this song, the first four lines are, “Its a great day to be alive, the sun’s still shining as I close my eyes. There are hard times in our neighborhoods. Why can’t every day be just this good.”

I don’t need to remind you of those hard times in our neighborhoods, our places of work and in our families and homes. The American Correctional Association and its Wall of Honor containing names of over 200 of our colleagues that have succumbed to this awful and consuming pandemic is a prime example. Additionally, we are faced with unprecedented budget challenges that not only impact our services and programs provided to those under our supervision but also directly touch the well-being and way of life for our staff. It has been said that the truest test of a person or organization’s character is how

they handle adversity. The professionals that make up the American Correctional Association have faced adversity and made tomorrow a better place for those we touch.

For me, I have had the unique opportunity to look behind the curtain of the American Correctional Association with more frequency than most presidents given our last 12 months of COVID. Even though these have been difficult and tragic times, my nearly daily interaction with the ACA team this past year has been a remarkable gift. It has given me a front row seat to observe some great effort and work from our ACA team:

- I have seen our Executive Director Jim Gondles negotiate with hotel after hotel and convention centers to protect our resources during the adjustments and cancellations in our last two planned gatherings. The insight of our ACA leadership to have included conference insurance covering pandemics so this allowed us to sustain a minimal loss on the cancellation of our 150<sup>th</sup> Congress of Correction. Jim has demonstrated great leadership.
- As crazy as things got in the last year, I watched Jeff

Washington provide a spiritual and stabilizing influence, including to this president, that was significant in getting all of us through this time.

- When we were in greatest need of resources, and we are not far from that point today, Dr. Betty Gondles has reached out to our federal partners securing contracts and cooperative agreements including the initiative on staff wellness. She has also been the face of ACA internationally, getting up at the wee hours of the morning to speak to about ACA and corrections.
- In support of our effort to expand accreditation throughout this country, David Haasenritter, Jim and Jeff were willing to take calls, make trips and set everything aside to support agencies wanting to be recognized as “Accredited by the American Correctional Association”.
- I could go on and on about the customer service focus of Roberta, India, Hok, Kelli, Doreen, Mike, David and all the ACA staff, not just for this president but also for all engaging ACA.

And Debbi Seeger has been steadfastly responsive to questions and concerns whether she was on the clock or not.

And I have seen much more! Our ACA staff has been remarkable.

Every two years in this General session time is reserved for the outgoing president to provide remarks about the achievements during this term. There have been some remarkable things happen during these two years. I want to mention just a couple of these achievements you, our members, and our ACA committees can acknowledge as a job well done.

- Who would have thought given these times so often defined by the COVID pandemic, that aca could expand agencies seeking ACA accreditation. The states of Illinois, North Carolina, and Mississippi have launched into the accreditation process. Further Arizona is under contract to start this process and South Carolina is investigating entering into this process; that is 10% of our state systems. Additionally, through the effort of Dr. Betty Gondles, ACA has initiated working with several international countries on training and accreditation.
- ACA, in conjunction with accredited jails and prisons, have implemented the comprehensive standards created around restrictive housing for jails and prisons and are now auditing to those standards.
- Staff wellness that has been front and center at recent conferences is now the subject of a cooperative agreement between ACA and BJA. This has yielded

a national survey on this topic and will provide an awareness of best practices that will be taken across the country to systems improve the lives of our staff.

- ACA work with the National Governors Association, with assistance from the CDC, during my time as president has continued. Under this partnership education and training has been provided to various governors offices, state departments of corrections, other state departments, and community providers in 14 different states. This initiative's main goals are to emphasize the importance of medications for opioid use disorder and how to effectively implement treatment programs in corrections with assistance from all statewide stakeholders which follows ACA's mission to improve the justice system and our principle of humanity. Under this initiative, a roadmap document on how to implement medications for opioid use disorders programs in justice involved populations will be released on February 9<sup>th</sup>, and I'm pleased to announce that the partnership between the ACA and the National Governors Association has been renewed and will continue under Commissioner Parker's term as ACA president.
- An ad hoc committee who has been working to enhance training provided at and between our conferences. This committee has developed sessions that will grow into training tracks that will have a direct benefit to our correctional professionals at all levels and in all disciplines.

- There have been many initiatives and trainings generated by our healthcare committees under the leadership of Dr. Deol that are changing the way we practice corrections.
- When we physically are able to meet again, hopefully in Nashville this summer, our Policy and Resolutions Committee will take up some important work that has been initiated by some aca committees including:
  - Bail reform to promote the reduction of people in our jails awaiting a trial that do not pose a public threat and are just there because they don't have money.
  - Encourage the reduction of collateral consequences in state statutes that can create life-long sentences for anyone convicted of felonies or even misdemeanors after their sentences have ended.
- Finally, I believe that there will be many recommendations on "terminology" that will make it to the Policies and Resolutions Committee for discussion and debate, including what we call those under our supervision.

These achievements have little to do with this president, and so much more by the energy, creativity and commitment of correctional professionals that make up our great American Correctional Association.

I want to conclude with the thought of hope. Until I started preparing these remarks, I failed to realize that the word hope can only be applied to future events. Hope is truly our aspirational view of our future.

We have recently experienced the traditions and ceremonies associated with swearing in a new President of the United States. I am pleased and honored to participate in our own ceremony. You will soon welcome a great correctional professional, Tony Parker as our 107<sup>th</sup> president. I know Tony along with Tony Wilkes our Vice President, Denise Robinson, President-elect, and Dr. Deol our Treasurer will sustain the sense of hope for our American Correctional Association.

As I close, I have some specific items of hope for our profession I would like to leave you with:

- I am hopeful we will continue to follow the science of research and place individuals in settings in our criminal justice system that creates the best opportunity for positive change not for punitive satisfaction
- I am hopeful that we continue to reduce the collateral consequences that restrict the lives of those men and women in the criminal justice system for the rest of their lives
- I am hopeful that all of our correctional systems continue to develop and enhance incentives for program participation

and good behavior to recognize that how someone spends time incarcerated should count, not just turning a page on a calendar to determine release

- I am hopeful that the public will recognize our correctional staff as great public servants; I believe our greatest public servants of our time. We know our staff of all disciplines in our settings respond to more incidents that could cause loss of life than any other group of professionals. So, every time a list of first responders is being recognized, and our staff is not on the list, I am hopeful we stand up and demand our staff is recognized.
- Finally, in the spirit of unity that we heard during our presidential inauguration, I am hopeful we recognize that each of us was created by our God and that we are more alike than different; and that we all make mistakes. Some of us who have avoided spending time in prison have committed acts more egregious than those incarcerated. And once we recognize this, we act accordingly. We eliminate the labeling of individuals in the criminal justice system as offenders, inmates, convicts,

criminals, etc. The more I have thought about this, I think the answer is simply referring to those we supervise as “men and women that are incarcerated or under supervision”, an effort that reminds us of our commonness as human beings.

The most important person in my life I never met was Robert Kennedy. He wrote something appropriate for us today. “The future does not belong to those who are content with today, apathetic toward common problems and their fellow man, timid and fearful in the face of bold project and new ideas. Rather, it will belong to those who can blend passion, reason and courage in a personal commitment to the ideals of American society.”

It has been the professional honor of my life to serve as your 106<sup>th</sup> president. May God bless you and may you find many smiles during your life’s journey. Thank you.



Gary C. Mohr  
ACA Immediate Past President

## Closing Session Speech

**I**n my comments during the General Session, I spoke of hope and emphasized that hope is always looking into our future. I believe that should be our focus as the American Correctional Association and in our own lives. It is a worthy calling to be dedicated to public service, particularly members of our public who live in the shadows, a term taken Governor John Kasich. In thinking about those we work to serve, we are reminded that God created us all and we are more alike than different.

But how did each of us get to this point in our careers and our lives? That requires a look back. Without question many others have lifted us up early in our professional endeavors and during our greatest

challenges. I am asking for each of us today, to remember one or more of those people in our lives that we owe so much.

As the last act of my presidency, I am asking, actually calling on each of you to do one thing. I would like you to consider handwriting a personal note affirming the impact that special person has had on your life, or your career. Given some of our ages, some of those most special people may have passed from this earth. If that is the case, please send your note to their spouse or children and let them know how you feel. For those still with us, please send them your personal note. Just like they lifted you up at a critical time in your life, this can bring a smile or even a tear to a deserving person or a loved

one. This is not a task I will ask you to perform and for me to ignore. May God bless you and your family and our great organization, the American Correctional Association, and may each of you find many smiles. It has been my pleasure to serve as your 106<sup>th</sup> president these last two years.

And now it is my honor to introduce our 107<sup>th</sup> president Tony Parker once again, who will give you an overview of the next two years.



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