



MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Before I was a nurse, I was a soccer coach.

Blake K. Smith, MSN, RN, FADLN, FAAN

I SPENT YEARS ON A SIDELINE teaching young athletes that success isn't defined by one great game — it's defined by consistency, discipline, and growth over time. We didn't just ask, "Did we win?"

We asked, "Are we becoming the team we said we wanted to be?"

I think about that often during Nurses Week.

Because this week isn't just about appreciation. It's about trajectory.

In the first four months of 2026, Nebraska nurses have been building momentum.

We formally submitted public comments — in coordination with the American Nurses Association and in alignment with peer state nursing associations — opposing the U.S. Department of Education proposal that excluded graduate nursing programs from the federal "professional degree" designation. That decision directly affects student loan limits and access to advanced nursing education. When nursing education is diminished, access to care suffers. We made it clear: advanced nursing education is essential to the health of our communities.

At the state level, our advocacy remained focused on expanding access to care and protecting the health of Nebraska communities. We stood with Certified Nurse Midwives by opposing legislation that would have limited their scope of practice and created unnecessary barriers for Nebraska families. We also backed efforts to expand Nurse Practitioner scope of practice for fluoroscopy procedures — a practical step that improves access while maintaining strong safety standards.

Our work also extended beyond scope issues. We advocated for measures ensuring Nebraska schools have access to epinephrine for students experiencing life-threatening allergic reactions and joined the American Academy of Pediatrics in supporting evidence-based

vaccine recommendations that protect children and communities.

And we supported legislation strengthening protections against workplace violence for healthcare workers — because those who dedicate their lives to caring for others deserve to feel safe in the environments where they serve.

- That's not abstract policy.
- That's safety.
- That's access.
- That's community.

We saw that momentum firsthand during Nurses Day at the Legislature — when nurses and students stood in the Capitol not as observers, but as engaged professionals shaping the conversation.

But our responsibility extends beyond any single bill.

For 24 consecutive years, nursing has been ranked the most trusted profession in America. That trust is not accidental. It is earned through accountability, professionalism, evidence-based practice, and an unwavering respect for human dignity.

Nurses understand what it takes to earn the public's confidence.

And when any of us serve in roles entrusted with public authority, that same standard must apply. Trust is never sustained through fear or position alone. It is sustained through integrity.

As a coach, I used to tell my players: discipline determines destiny.

- For our profession, advocacy determines access.
- Education determines excellence.
- Standards determine trust.
- Participation determines our future.

That's why we are strengthening partnerships with the Nebraska State Student Nurses Association. It's why we are building out our Health Policy Fellowship Program. It's why we are clarifying benchmarks and modernizing communication — so that our association is not only active, but durable for the next generation.

This Nurses Week, I don't just want you to feel appreciated.

I want you to recognize your influence.

Nursing in Nebraska is not reacting to change — we are shaping it. Quietly. Professionally. Persistently.

For more than 120 years, Nebraska nurses have built something extraordinary. Each generation has strengthened the profession — not just through clinical excellence, but through leadership, advocacy, and a commitment to the communities we serve.

Thank you for trusting me, in this chapter, to help carry that legacy forward. ❖

Happy Nurses Week, Nebraska.

Let's keep building.

— Blake

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