



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Carrying the Story Forward

AS WE PREPARE for the 2026 Nebraska Nurses Association Convention, I have found myself reflecting not only on where we are going as an organization, but also on where we have been.

This year marks 120 years of the Nebraska Nurses Association. That is more than a milestone on a calendar. It is a reminder that generations of Nebraska nurses came before us with the courage, vision, and commitment to build something bigger than themselves. They organized. They advocated. They educated. They led. They cared for their communities and helped shape the nursing profession across our state.

Now, 120 years later, we have the privilege and responsibility of carrying that story forward.

In my own life, I have been thinking a lot about legacy lately. Maybe that comes with stepping into this role as president. Maybe it comes from looking at my daughters and thinking about the example we leave behind. Or maybe it is simply because I turned 40 this year, and apparently that is when you start using words like “legacy” without irony.

Whatever the reason, I have found myself reflecting on the people who saw something in me before I fully saw it in myself. The teachers, coaches, mentors, nurses, and leaders who gave me a chance, challenged me to grow, and reminded me that leadership is not about a title. It is about showing up consistently, doing the work, and helping others see what is possible in themselves.

That is the power of a professional community, and for 120 years, NNA has served as that kind of community for Nebraska nurses.

This year's convention gives us a meaningful opportunity to honor that history while also looking boldly toward the future. Our recognition of NNA's 120th year will take place at the convention itself, where nurses from across Nebraska will gather to reflect and celebrate the story we are still building together.

As part of that recognition, the Board-appointed Historical Taskforce is helping create a display highlighting the history of Nebraska nurses and the legacy of our association. That display will be available at the convention for attendees to experience firsthand. We will also hear from a panel of Nebraska nurse leaders who will share stories from their own journeys and reflect on how nursing leadership continues to evolve across our state.

At the same time, this convention will challenge us to think about what comes next. We are honored to welcome Katie Boston-Leary, PhD, MBA, RN, FADLN, FAONL, FAAN, Senior Vice President of Equity and Engagement at the American Nurses Association, as

a keynote speaker. Dr. Boston-Leary is a nationally recognized nurse leader whose work has reached across nursing practice, workforce, equity, engagement, leadership, and innovation. Having her join us in Nebraska is significant, and her message will help us connect the legacy of where we have been with the future we are responsible for shaping.

That balance between legacy and future is exactly what this moment calls for.

The challenges facing nursing today are real. Workforce strain, workplace violence, access to care, burnout, and rapid change in health care are not abstract issues. Nebraska nurses are living them every day in hospitals, clinics, schools, homes, long-term care, public health, academia, advanced practice, leadership, and every corner of our communities.

But the strength of Nebraska nurses is also real.

We are known for showing up, doing the work, and caring deeply for the people and communities we serve. Through NNA, we have the opportunity to turn that individual commitment into collective impact. Our convention is one of the most important ways we do that. It is where nurses across roles, generations, specialties, and regions come together to learn, reconnect, share ideas, and remember that we are not doing this work alone.

Registration is now open, and I kindly invite you to be part of this moment. Come to convention. Bring a colleague. Encourage a student. Invite someone who has never attended before. Reconnect with NNA if it has been a while. Step into the room not only to receive, but to contribute.

As president, I am deeply aware that I am only one part of a much longer story. This role is about stewardship. It is about honoring those who came before us, supporting those leading beside us, and creating space for those who will come after us.

As we celebrate 120 years of NNA, I cannot think of a better time for Nebraska nurses to come together, recommit to one another, and continue building the future of our profession.

I look forward to seeing you at convention. 🔥

With gratitude,

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

President, Nebraska Nurses Association