

Election reforms pave the way for future elections

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AMA Speaker

One of the defined responsibilities of the Speaker of the AMA House of Delegates (HOD) is to oversee its elections. At the 2019 Annual Meeting, the House adopted two resolutions calling upon Dr. Lisa Egbert, our Vice-Speaker, and me to appoint and lead a task force to recommend improvement in our election process. Two members of our Southeastern Delegation (SED), Drs. John Poole and Josh Lesko, served with distinction alongside nine other members from around the country. After two years of meetings, extensive deliberation, surveying and listening, the task force presented 41 recommendations to the HOD at our June 2021 meeting. Ultimately, with the support of the SED, 39 of the recommendations were adopted and one recommendation referred (a report back will be presented at the November 2021 meeting).

The primary goal of the task force was to ensure that the election process selected the most qualified candidates to lead our Association. To accomplish this, recommendations were written to remove obstacles, particularly financial, that discouraged qualified individuals from seeking elected positions while also making campaigns more equitable and transparent. At the same time, an informed electorate has to have ample opportunity to learn about each candidate. The interview process, such as developed by the SED leadership, was widely recognized as the most important tool to “vet” candidates.

We made efforts to reduce unnecessary costs by eliminating those expenses that did not impact delegates’ votes, while also recognizing that some expenditures were valued because they provided opportunities for delegates to interact with candidates outside the formal interview process. The survey of our HOD made clear that a majority of delegates placed little value on printed materials and actually preferred not to receive multiple communications from individual candidates. Going forward, the HOD office will arrange for limited campaign materials to be electronically communicated to delegates and posted online with equal opportunity for all candidates.

Another concern addressed was that the election process interrupted and distracted from the House policy deliberation. The virtual format of our 2020 and 2021 elections forced us to rethink our voting process and resulted in the designation of an “election session” - a defined session during which all voting, including any runoffs are held, a process that will be continued for in-person meetings. The House will then resume policy deliberation at a “time certain” without further interruption. The evolution to electronic voting greatly enhances the efficiency of our voting process while also maintaining security.

Over the years, the SED has been remarkably successful in identifying qualified individuals for leadership positions and getting their candidates elected. This is a tribute to the entire SED, but particularly to the executive committee and our chairs. I am confident that as we embrace these election reforms that the SED will continue to lead the way.

It had been 16 years since the AMA undertook a detailed review of our election process. Back then, the entire report was referred back and the recommendations were never adopted. Our AMA has evolved over the years and advancements in technology now offers us new opportunities. Meanwhile, some of our traditions have served us well and should rightly be continued. Combining modern communication, websites and virtual interviews with in-person social interactions will ensure the delegates are knowledgeable about the candidates' qualifications and are able to cast their votes for the preferred choices.

Reviewing our campaign and election processes, with an eye toward improving them, should be an iterative process with ongoing examination. The adopted recommendations may simply be first steps toward additional reform, spur unique ideas going forward, or may prove to be ineffective. Embracing this concept, the final recommendation adopted by our HOD was for a review of the adopted reforms after two years. As your Speaker, I will continue to watch-over our elections to ensure fairness and compliance with our guiding principles.

Note: The current election bylaws and policies reflecting all the adopted reforms are now posted on the AMA [website](#).