Dear Colleagues,

This is a hard letter to write because today I say goodbye. It’s also hard because there are so many things I’d like to say, so many stories I’d like to relate, so many people I’d like to congratulate and so many more I’d like to thank.

My biggest thanks go, of course, to my family, especially my wife Christine, who put up with 80-hour work weeks and not having me around much. A heartfelt thanks also to Bob Suskind at LSU who recognized the importance of what I would be doing, and brought me to his department to do it. John Lewy at Tulane, my other Chairperson, deserves a pat on the back, as well. And then, like an Academy Award winner, I’d like to thank each and every member of the AAP staff. I can’t name you all, so everyone please accept my thanks.

It really does seem like only yesterday that I stood before you, and then published my first column, offering insight into the direction I wished to go on behalf of children and pediatricians. As I write my 12th column, I think back on how I’ve ranged widely throughout the year, commenting about the importance of family and primary of family responsibility in rearing children. I’ve spoken about the role of pediatricians and questioned whether we were accurately describing some of our accomplishments. Columnists also have touched on discipline, asked whether the Academy should get involved in “hot” issues like physician-assisted suicide, and challenged the availability of guns in the environment in which we’re helping our children live and play. I’ve written about the Academy’s role and about trust, and I’ve very much enjoyed the “work of doing it.”

Some of my letters had an intentional spark of controversy, and you responded. Over the year there have been almost 150 letters, faxes and e-mails, in addition to several dozen phone calls and more than a few face-to-face discussions. I am pleased to report that only about a dozen of these were negative responses to things I’ve said, and some you’ve seen in this publication.

We are clearly an organization of many faces. I hope I have been able to give voice to at least a few of those during this year.

Now I come back to where I began and again state the challenge of our role as pediatricians. We are the best-educated, most knowledgeable and best-intentioned providers of health care for the children we serve. We are among the few who recognize the importance of children, from conception through adolescence.

Pediatricians and the Academy have committed ourselves to a lifelong campaign on their behalf. While my journey draws to a close, the AAP journey, almost 70 years in progress, is clearly not yet done. It may never be done. But I think the AAP knows where to go and how to get there. Do you? Think about it and let me, or perhaps Joel Alpert, know.

Joseph R. Zanga, M.D., FAAP
President, American Academy of Pediatrics

Correction
In the September AAP News, the incorrect photo accompanied the item by Jeffrey P. Kaplan in the story “Federal career changes.” At left is the correct photo. AAP News regrets the error.
Federal career changes
Marjorie Tharp
AAP News 1998;14;8
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The online version of this article, along with updated information and services, is located on the World Wide Web at:
http://aapnews.aappublications.org/content/14/10/8.2