

New Chairman's Address
Craig VanBuren
Thursday, July 18, 2019

It is an honor and great privilege to take over as the chairman of the National Conference on Weights and Measures. I would like to start out by thanking the nominating committee for considering me for this role and the conference body for electing me. Thank you to the volunteers who serve on the many committees, subcommittees, task groups and various other roles throughout the conference. Our work cannot be completed without the generosity of your time and effort. Thank you to the NCWM staff, Don, Elisa, Tyler, and Darrell, for their efforts and dedication to making the conference run as smoothly as it does and always striving to improve it. Last, but not least, thank you to my family for supporting me through this journey. Particularly, my wife Ronda who encouraged me to accept the position despite all the nights away from home.

I joined the weights and measures community twenty years ago through a chance game of golf. It was at that game where I was paired up with Michigan's Director of Consumer Protection and during our round, he convinced me that I should give him a call later to discuss coming to work for him. If you knew Pat, you know that he could be a very persuasive person. I joined the team in January of 2000 and jumped in with both feet.

I attended my first regional conference, CWMA, in April of that year and was encouraged to meet as many people and ask as many questions as I could. If you know me, you know that mingling is not one of my strong suits. However, what I found was this group of people was very easy to approach. Everyone I talked with was willing to answer questions and help me grow my knowledge. This made me dive into Handbook 44 and quickly learn that I had a lot of questions. Luckily, there was never a shortage of mentors to me and most would still recognize the names today; names like Mercer, Pinagel, DeRubeis, Onwiler, Colbrook, Hayes, Hankins and many more including and not forgetting, of course, Truex. I like to say; I was raised by CWMA. The rest, as they say, is history.

I share my weights and measures journey with you for this reason; it is because of the support from this family that I stand before you today. It was a reoccurring theme we heard yesterday; from Constantine's invocation mentioning "commitment", Deputy Secretary Romanski's talk of sharing knowledge, and Dr. Copan's actual recognition of this group as a family. It's amazing how many recognize the unique bond we all share. Frankly, the love I have for the people here in weights and measures is what has kept me here through the rough patches of my career. As we develop the strategic plan to meet our overarching goal of 5,000 members by 2025, one thing is for certain, we need to ensure the type of support I received continues to be there, not only for new members joining, but also not forgetting those here in the room today.

This leads us into my theme for the year; “Building our Future by Sharing Our Knowledge.” Our best tool for growing and retaining members is sharing the knowledge we have with others.

My first goal as chairman is to create a mentoring program for NCWM. We have a vast amount of knowledge among us and, from my experience, I know there are many willing to share. You could even consider this one part of a succession plan, not only for the Conference but for weights and measures as a whole. To many like myself, that initial contact and interaction is always the most difficult. If we can facilitate that introduction and get people comfortable with one another more quickly, the easier it will be to go to a person with questions. On the mentor’s side, this would help give a better idea of where the other needs to grow and can help steer them to a path of success.

My second goal for the year is to create an online marketing plan to share our knowledge with the outside world. We have the world at our fingertips, we need to use that power to our benefit and share, not only our knowledge, but our story; as Ron Hayes put it at the toast at the 100th meeting, “We’re the most powerful organization no one has ever heard of.” We need to make a concerted effort to change that. One of the great ways we’ve been doing that is with the toolkit videos. I believe we need create complementing pieces to those. I’ll be working with Don and his team to develop and implement online advertising campaigns with specific targets to get the best return on our investment and drive people to our information.

My final goal brings us back to you, the members. We heard Monday there were at least two areas members asked for training. I will work to find those and other training opportunities and bring them to you either here at the conference, at the regional meetings, or in any other place we can, whether that be online or in-person. As we’ve seen here the last few years with new items, devices are ever-changing and there is always something new we can learn whether it be a two-hour class or a 30-minute demonstration. Don’t be surprised if I reach out to some of you to provide this, particularly the AMC members. I know we’re all busy in our “regular” jobs, so I will do what I can to get you the tools and help you need so we can share that knowledge.

To that end, the NCWM has great opportunity for growth; in size, in scope, in responsibility, and in knowledge. It will not be easy, and there will be struggles, but as many in weights and measures programs, particularly in state and local governments, know if there is one thing we are good at, it is adapting and overcoming obstacles.

Thank you and I look forward to helping the National Conference on Weights and Measures grow!

Now I'd like to take an opportunity to make the following appointments;

S&T Committee

Loren Minnich, Kansas (5-year term)

L&R Committee

Tim Elliot, Washington (5-year term)

PDC

Paul Floyd, Louisiana (5-year term)

Nominating Committee (1-year term)

Committee Chair – Brett Gurney, Utah

Northeastern Representative – Jimmy Cassidy, Massachusetts

Central Representative – Ivan Hankins, Iowa

Southern Representative – Steve Benjamin, North Carolina

Active Member – Hal Prince, Florida

Active Member – Ron Hayes, Missouri

Credentials Committee

Vanessa Benchea, Florida (3 years)

Parliamentarian

Lou Straub, Fairbanks Scale (unless he's decided to actually retire!)

Chaplain

Gene Robertson, Mississippi

Presiding Officers

Central – Scott Ferguson, Michigan

Northeastern – Ethan Bogren, Westchester County New York

Western – Kevin Schnepf, California

Southern – Tim Chesser, Arkansas

The Sergeants at Arms at the 2020 conference will be Washington officials named at a later date.

Again, thank you to the volunteers serving, the NCWM staff, Shelly Miller and the state of Wisconsin and city of Milwaukee, and thank you for the opportunity to lead the Conference. I look forward to seeing you all in Riverside, California in January.