

30th Anniversary Dinner

Health Policy at the Speed of Trust

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In this season of gratitude, I'm so pleased to welcome you to the Alliance for Health Policy's 30th Anniversary Dinner. What a gift it is to see all of you after 3 years apart. We come back tonight to celebrate - and to also remember. We are the lucky ones.

All of us at the Alliance are honored to host you this evening in this beautiful space where we can celebrate the vast and diverse history of our country. Here, portraits of nearly every US president, regardless of party, live alongside the artwork of everyday people through the ages - all the way up to this year's teen portrait competition winners.

So, this is a fitting place to reflect on the Alliance's own legacy within the national health policy dialogue, and more importantly, on the legacy we want to leave to future generations.

And after 30 years, guess what? We are just getting started.

We are so grateful for the legacy of Senators Rockefeller and Danforth, a Democrat and a Republican, colleagues who founded the Alliance thirty years ago. They had different political views but they came together to create a trusted and credible source of health policy education for generations of congressional staff. And we thank the many other bipartisan congressional leaders who joined in their efforts along the way.

I want to thank our Board of Directors, from our founding members to the newest members-elect. Tom, I am so grateful for your service as our Chair this year. And we are so pleased to welcome Tanisha Carino as our incoming Chair to lead this incredibly talented and dedicated group of individuals. You truly inspire me.

And perhaps most importantly, thanks to the small but mighty Alliance team, including some of our founding members who are here with us tonight. Ed, when I called you in 2005 as a starry-eyed health policy analyst to ask if the Alliance could do a briefing on finding consensus in health policy, little did I imagine that I would be standing here one day. Thank you, and let me know when you find that consensus.

In all seriousness, as elusive as consensus may be, the Alliance has always had a reputation as a place where credible speakers would educate and inspire generations of health policy professionals on and off Capitol Hill.

That is why we are honored to serve the thousands of health policy wonks who have learned alongside us, whether over lunch in Dirksen G-50, or virtually from your dining room tables in all 50 states.

Today, it is more important than ever that we serve you as not only an unbiased source of information, but also a trusted source of information. And not only trusted, but also trustworthy – perhaps the highest standard of all.

Trust across our nation is at an all-time low as the divide between us has grown. This is hardly breaking news. All of us here tonight recognize that we live in a world where people follow the organizations they already trust and the facts they already believe to be true. The echo chamber can be deafening – and the outcome of this mistrust is ultimately a loss for the American people.

The truth is that despite all of the life-saving hope that modern medicine provides, too many of our fellow Americans are still experiencing health care as an incomprehensible maze. When even veteran health policy experts – including, I would guess, some of us – have been baffled by the complexity of signing up for Medicare, or incapable of finding a mental health professional, is it any wonder that ordinary citizens are feeling lost?

Indeed, when our loved ones are at their most vulnerable, when they're faced with illness or unanswered questions, I would argue that information without trust just adds to the background noise – and trust is the most precious resource that we must steward as a health policy community.

As we grappled with this reality at the Alliance, we realized we had to become an even better version of ourselves to remain true to our vision.

We realized, in order to be a trusted and trustworthy resource for the entire health policy community, that we would have to move at the speed of trust. And here is what that means.

First, it means we need to slow down and listen – to those sitting next to us and those across the aisle. As Jane Goodall said, “Change happens by listening and then starting a dialogue with the people who are doing something you don't believe is right.”

Second, moving at the speed of trust means we have to bring lived and learned experience to the table in a way that is inclusive, respectful, and authentic. In a world where many people begin with a foregone conclusion, working their way backwards to find the supporting facts, it is incumbent upon us at the Alliance to create safe spaces where shared truth can be found, and where trust can be rebuilt.

Third, moving at the speed of trust means we have to hold ourselves accountable to live these values from the inside out. Where there is diversity of thought, there will inevitably be some disagreement.

But the way through disagreement is not to shut people out or even to call them out. Instead, let's consider that inviting voices different from our own into the conversation might be the single most courageous thing we can do to make our country a better place.

This is not an idle exercise – and there are no shortcuts to building trust.

In the words of Dr. Reed Tuckson, the Alliance strives to create a microcosm of the world we all want to live in – one in which constructive conversations can and do happen; in which affected people are included and heard; and in which we catalyze sustainable solutions that will withstand the test of public scrutiny.

And so, I am confident that in our next 30 years, we will not waver in our founding mission to empower current and future health policy leaders by advancing their knowledge and understanding of the issues that matter.

To all of you who have supported and championed us, whether for the past 30 years or the past 30 minutes, we could not be more grateful.

Together we will foster bipartisan relationships. We will champion courageous conversations and break through pervasive challenges. And, in doing so, we will define the future of health policy.

It won't be easy. It won't always be this fun. But it is the hard work we must do if we want to earn and retain the trust of the American people.

And this Alliance – your Alliance – is where we are creating this legacy, together.