Happy Holiday season to all of our Region VIII members! This is such a beautiful time of celebration, no matter which holiday(s) you celebrate. It’s a time of family togetherness, hope, and renewal looking forward to a fresh, new year.

Legislative Affairs:

ASCLS has been very active this fall. I know you all saw the Action Alert regarding the PAMA issue. The alert that went out stated that: “The laboratory community is calling on Congress to pass “freeze-bridge” legislation to delay this next round of PAMA cuts. The proposal would freeze the 2018 rates in both 2019 and 2020 allowing time to develop an accurate methodology to implement PAMA. Additionally, the second round of data collection, scheduled to occur early next year, would also be delayed until a new methodology is in place. During the two-year freeze period, Congress would require the National Academy of Medicine to conduct a study and publish recommendations on how to best implement the least burdensome, statistically valid data collection that is representative of the laboratory markets and an appropriate rate-setting methodology that is representative of the market and ensures sustainable patient access.”

Many of you signed on to this letter that went to your representatives in Congress. Of my three legislators, I received replies from two of them. One reply was from my Representative and did not address PAMA at all, instead it was just a generic ‘Medicare needs work’ reply. The other reply came from one of my Senators and addressed the actual issue, promising to fight for our ask. I have yet to receive a reply from the other Senator. This is fairly typical when sending these letters. The point is that we cannot get discouraged when we receive the generic letters. For every one of those, you will get a response that is directly related to the issue in question. The more they hear from us the more they will take notice of our ‘asks’. It is imperative that we continue to fight for these issues and let our legislators know that we’re here to stay and we’re not going to give up the fight.

Membership:

Membership numbers are still down but are slowly beginning to rise. We are seeing numbers shifting across categories of membership with the new structure. The Emeritus category has increased substantially while Professional has decreased in direct relation to the increase in Emeritus. This is also when we see the increase in our Developing Professionals since many of our students join in the fall of the year. Have you seen the monthly contest that our ASCLS Membership Committee is sponsoring? The October contest was to design a lab-themed pumpkin and the November contest was to identify and give Thanks for ASCLS members who make a difference every day. Region VIII has taken home the prize 2 months in a row! Congratulations to Abbey Wichman, MT for the October pumpkin and J.R. Constance, Colorado for the November giving Thanks entry. Melissa Dumoulin, Idaho is our Region VIII Membership Chair and the Vice-chair of the ASCLS Membership Committee. Please don’t hesitate to contact Melissa with any questions, comments, suggestions, etc. regarding membership.
Region VIII Leadership Academy:

Speaking of Membership, did you know our 2017-2018 Class of Interns (Tina Dihle, CO; Abbey Wichman, MT; Abou Drammeh, MT; Kami McGann, ID) created an informative packet of information regarding all things ASCLS that also includes video interviews with members in our Region? The packet and link to the videos are posted on our region and state websites and I have also attached a copy with this message. Our new class, Kate DeAngelo, ID and Jordan Smith, WY are well into their intern year and working on another very exciting project. Look forward to a preview of their work at your State meeting this spring. In January we will be posting information for applicants to our 2019-2020 Region VIII Leadership Academy. Watch for details on this and if you are interested in participating or know of someone who you would recommend, please contact our co-coordinators, Joni Gilstrap, MT and Ashlee Ketchum, MT.

IMSS:

We had another very successful IMSS in September thanks to the hard work of General Chair, Abbey Wichman and her dedicated Planning Committee. The 2019 Planning Committee chaired by Omar Muñoz, UT is already hitting the ground running! Save the Date…. October 10-12, 2019! The venue will be different this year with all events taking place at the Snow King and the Snow King Pavilion directly behind the Hotel. We will not be using the Snow King Sports and Event Center (Ice Rink) this year for any of the conference; exhibits, scientific sessions and networking activities will all be located up the hill from the Ice Rink (SEC) at the Snow King. Our theme is FOCUS ON THE FUTURE – watch for more information coming to you as the planning progresses. If you are interested in helping with the planning of our 56th IMSS, please don’t hesitate to contact Omar.

Upcoming Educational Conferences:

Mark your calendars for 2019 conferences beginning with CLEC (Clinical Laboratory Educators Conference) in Baltimore, MD, February 21-23. This is an important annual event for faculty, administrators, directors, advisers and others in clinical laboratory science education. This conference is an excellent opportunity to identify trends and strategies, manage change, enhance instructional skills, or develop innovative teaching techniques. Did you know there are four speakers at CLEC this year from Region VIII? Audrey Hentzen, Jed Doxtater, and Dino Madsen all from Wyoming and Joan Polancic, Colorado will be presenting sessions on Workforce Issues and Their Impact on MLT/MLS Practicum/Clinical Training, Innovations that Work, and Articulation Agreements: MLT/MLS Collaborative Programs. You can view the program and registration information at the ASCLS website under Education-Meetings.

March brings the annual Legislative Symposium in Alexandria, VA. The dates are March 18-19 and the room block at the Alexandria Hilton will be opening shortly – watch for updates on the ASCLS website. The Legislative Symposium is an amazing experience for all who attend. This ASCLS event originated in 1989 and now has 5 partner organizations who have joined us; Clinical Laboratory Management Association (CLMA), American Society for Clinical Pathology (ASCP), Association of Genetic Technologists (AGT), American Medical Technologists (AMT), and the National Society for Histotechnology (NSH). The members of these organizations meet with their Representatives and Senators on Capitol Hill as a
unified front on behalf of our profession. The Legislative Symposium provides a great education on the how-to's of lobbying. We are coached on presentation techniques so we can effectively talk to our congressional representative during our pre-arranged appointments. We are always well received in the congressional offices. We return home from Washington with first-hand knowledge of the political system in action and confidence that we can make a difference. Make your plans now to attend the Legislative Symposium and while you’re at it, remember that the ASCLS Board of Directors holds their Interim BOD meeting on Sunday, March 17 so if you wish to attend the BOD meeting also, be sure to fly in on Saturday. The Symposium consists of educational sessions and legislative updates on Monday, March 18. Then on Tuesday after making appointments with your Senators and Representatives prior to arrival, you will go to the Hill and meet with them to lobby for issues impacting our profession.

Beginning in April, we have our State spring meetings. ASCLS-Montana leads off this year with their meeting on April 4-6 at the Bighorn Resort in Billings. The following week we have ASCLS-Idaho’s meeting in Boise, April 11-13. The ASCLS-CO and ASCLS-WY Collaborative meeting, CLCC, will be May 2-3, in Denver. ASCLS-Utah’s date is not set yet but I know that Omar and his team are working on plans for their meeting. Last year I had the good fortune to attend all 4 meetings across our Region. It was a wonderful experience and it brought home just how amazing these conferences are for our members. Every meeting was excellent with wonderful speakers, exhibits, and networking opportunities. This is a time that all members can hear what’s happening in ASCLS at the state level, regional level and national level. It’s a time to celebrate our profession and our friendships. Mark your calendars now and get those vacation requests submitted - and remember, all are welcome to attend any of the state meetings.

June brings the ASCLS Annual Meeting in Charlotte, North Carolina. Dates are June 23-27, 2019. The week begins on Sunday, June 23 with the ASCLS Board of Directors meeting followed by ASCLS committee meetings through the afternoon. This is your opportunity to see your organization at work. Make a point to get to Charlotte on Saturday, June 22 so you can take full advantage of your membership by attending these meetings and making your voice heard. ASCLS is proud to be a grassroots organization which means your voice is important and needs to be heard. This is going to be an excellent meeting with many innovative ideas now that we are not coordinating with AACC. J. R. Constance, Colorado is a member of the AMSC (Annual Meeting Steering Committee) and I know he and the committee have been very busy planning a great meeting.

As we celebrate the joy of the season, I want to wish all of you a wonderful holiday and a very Happy New Year! I celebrate the friendships I have made through ASCLS and know how fortunate I am to be a part of something so special. As we said at IMSS this year, we truly are one big family, committed to excellence in our work keeping the patient uppermost. We engage in best practices to insure accurate and timely testing. We might be ‘behind the scenes’ but we know the value of our work and our membership in ASCLS is vital to helping promote that value to the world around us.