Texas patients and their physicians won big at the state Capitol. We had more wins than in recent sessions across all issues affecting patient care, as outlined in TMA's Healthy Vision 2020. In fact, nearly every TMA bill made it to the finish line, either intact or as an amendment. And every bill TMA wanted stopped was stopped.

It was a triumphant legislative session for medicine. As credited to late U.S. House Speaker Tip O'Neill, “all politics is local,” and this year we did local better than ever. The keys to our success are the time and effort TMA members took to educate their legislators about issues affecting patient care. Texas legislators listened and delivered for their constituents. Bills unsuccessful in the past two, three, even five sessions moved this year, like no other.

Thanks to our many friends at the state Capitol, companies no longer can steal physicians’ discounted fees, vaccines now are tax-deductible, and the physician-led medical team model of care is now law.

But our work isn’t finished. Left undone was finding a way to broaden coverage for the 6 million Texans without health care coverage. We will continue to look for innovative solutions that leverage federal dollars to help provide access for these working poor Texans.

We also must ensure legislators friendly to medicine stay in office and all our elected officials clearly understand issues facing patients and their physicians. Together, we can and do make a difference.
Stopped Theft of Physician Services
It took more than six years, but TMA and our state legislators never gave up. Now a new law regulating silent PPOs penalizes unethical third parties who steal and resell physicians' discounted rates, for commercial and Medicaid contracts.

Lawmakers also passed a prompt pay law for Medicaid HMOs; no more low-pay, slow-pay, no-pay.

Cut Red Tape and Regulation
Six hassle-busting bills passed. One lets patients sign in with a swipe of their driver license. The others will bring uniform prior-authorization forms for medications and medical services, a much more streamlined way of renewing physicians' state Controlled Substances Registration, and significant simplifications complying with the state's medical privacy law.

Reined in Medicaid Fraud Investigations
Now in place is a new law to improve due process, transparency, and expediency when the Medicaid Office of Inspector General accuses a physician of fraud and abuse.

Protected Your Medical Judgment
TMA's 2011 legislation limiting direct hiring of physicians to rural areas and mandating protections for physicians' independent medical judgment in all employment scenarios remained intact. Two bills passed adhering to Texas' 2011 employment law and providing additional protections for physicians.

Battled Physician Shortages
Graduate medical education (GME) funding slashed in 2011 was nearly restored. Lawmakers recognized the dire need to retain Texas' medical school graduates and for the first time created incentive programs to grow GME by providing more money for training costs. Family medicine residency program funding also was doubled. Texas' physician loan repayment program was enhanced to help physicians afford to practice in rural, underserved areas. Lawmakers also stopped off-shore medical schools from buying up core clinical clerkship spots in Texas hospitals. A 2011 law that made Texas the only state that forced physicians on visas (international medical graduates) to spend three years working in medically underserved areas was repealed.

No Budget Cuts. More Money for Health Care
Legislators wrote a big increase in funding for mental health and substance abuse services, along with important changes in our mental health screening and education systems. The steep budget cuts to women's health services in 2011 were reversed. Lawmakers even added more money to these programs to ensure low-income women receive timely care.

Enacted Tax Relief for Doctors
Tax relief for small businesses — like so many Texas physicians' practices — passed. Primary care physicians finally get a tax break for their vaccine stock. And, legislation was passed that clarified sales tax definitions of exempted medical supplies, such as intravenous systems. The hard-fought-for 2005 tax exemption for physicians who treat patients covered by Medicaid, Medicare, the Children's Health Insurance Program, workers' compensation, and other government payers is intact.

Blocked Scope Expansions
Our landmark scope bill that sets up a more collaborative, delegated practice among physicians and advanced practice nurses or physician assistants is now law. The law firmly establishes the physician-led medical team, allows all involved to practice at their level of education and training, and places more authority and responsibility on the physician to supervise. TMA never deviated from the core principle that diagnosing and prescribing remain the practice of medicine. Now we have a process and a model for future scope-of-practice discussions. Also, lawmakers added a provision that defines pain management as the practice of medicine. All unwarranted scope expansion bills were stopped.

Protected Young Texans
New laws improve Texas' immunization policies. Child care centers now must have a vaccination policy in place for their workers, and minor parents now can consent to their own vaccines. The state budget keeps the state Fitnessgram program alive in schools, providing critical data to address the state's obesity epidemic.