We have gone on to positions of national prominence in academia, clinical medicine, industry, and government — to chair 14 academic departments, to become Deans of 7 medical schools and senior executives of 9 academic health systems and universities, to assume very senior positions in industry at 4 international corporations, and to take on 4 very senior posts in the federal government. Twenty of Bill’s recruits have been elected to the Institute of Medicine, 2 to the National Academy of Sciences (including 1 new member this year), and 48 to the AAP (including 3 new members this year). And this accounting misses the many who have gone on to other splendid and productive careers in each of these domains.

For over three decades in positions of leadership and trust, Bill always planted next year’s crop of rice, never forgetting that the real task was to grow the next generation. Many in our profession are in his debt, and we all thank him for what he passed on to us.

It is my great honor, on behalf of the Association of American Physicians, to present the George M. Kober Medal to Dr. William N. Kelley.

2005 Association of American Physicians Kober Medal

Acceptance of the 2005 Kober Medal

William N. Kelley, M.D.

Thank you, Ed, for those wonderful comments and thank you, Francis, for your very special homegrown entertainment. Clearly, it has been people like the two of you who have contributed so much to make my professional career so immensely enjoyable.

Thanks also to the officers and councilors of the AAP for selecting me to receive the Kober Medal this year, certainly a signal event in my professional life. I have been sitting in the audience for virtually all of the Kober Medal presentations since 1966, nearly 40 years ago. I have enjoyed learning more about so many of my professional heroes, mentors, and colleagues through these many years. To have my name added to that list of legends of American medicine today is truly an unbelievable experience. Again, my deepest appreciation.

Before I go further, I would like to recognize my family. One takes great pride in one’s professional accomplishments and successes, and I certainly do. However, one’s feelings, love, and devotion to family go far beyond one’s life’s work. So, I am especially pleased that most can be here today, including my wife of 45 years and best friend, Lois, 3 of our 4 adult children with their spouses, 2 wonderful foster parents, and 8 of our 9 grandchildren, along with 1 additional grandson here in utero. Would all of you please stand? We dearly miss our oldest daughter, Paige, who is severely retarded, mentally and physically, due to cytomegalovirus contracted in utero. Our oldest grandson, Jamie, who is severely retarded, mentally and physically, due to cytomegalovirus contracted in utero.

There are others I would like to thank in the time I have available. Perhaps first and foremost, I want to thank the many with whom I have worked closely over the years. Many are professional colleagues with whom I have interacted in innumerable settings throughout the world. Some are individuals that I have had an opportunity to recruit as faculty in one of the three great institutions where I have had an opportunity to serve. A few, who are in some ways most meaningful to me, are those with whom I have had a chance to work in the laboratory. So much of the learning and mentoring I have received, as well as the enjoyment and pride I have felt, comes from the rich experience of working with so many truly outstanding people at every level. We learn from them, they help us mature in our thinking, and they provide incredible personal and professional satisfaction as they succeed in their careers. One evolves from the joy of discovery and getting one’s work published in Science, the JCI, or NEJM, to even greater excitement and pride when one of your mentorees makes an important discovery, achieves important recognition, or assumes a major leadership position.

I would like very much to be specific about dozens of these very special colleagues in my life, many of whom are in the audience today. Given the practical constraints of this presentation, however, I will narrow the list to 5 senior physicians at the very top of that long list, who I would like to recognize and thank.

The first on the list is my late father, Dr. Oscar Lee Kelley. In the mid- to late 1940s, following his return from overseas duty with the Air Corps in World War II, he re-established his practice of cardiology in Palm
Beach. On weekends, holidays, and in the summer, he would take me with him on his morning routine of house calls and hospital rounds. Sometimes, I would have to wait in the nursing station or in the car, initially a Model A Ford, I might add, while he attended at Parkland Memorial Hospital in 1963. I not the nursing station or in the car, initially a rounds. Sometimes, I would have to wait in other than medicine. As an aside, I remember friends, colleagues, and patients, that he was the real Dr. Kelley. I guess this was somewhat medicine and will be forever with me. Indeed, and meet the patients and their families. The pursuits an academic career, I believe he was as myself. Dr. Seldin encouraged me to apply to the NIH for a position and he and a junior offered a position there. Dr. Seldin's support and my Dad to an opportunity. Perhaps a more important question is whether those giants will be there for future generations. I would answer with a resounding “yes.” Their names will be different, of course, and what they do even may be different, but they will be there and they will be no less important in the future than they are today. I do have serious concerns, however, about the flip side of this issue, which I will call the “black hole” of academic medicine for the sake of a better term. Even today there are many talented aspiring young stars who do not have the good fortune to link with the right mentor. In this case, they may lose the magnificent opportunity to pursue a successful academic career and their potential contributions to science will be lost. I attribute this to a series of fatal flaws at the institutional level which we, as leaders in our own academic institutions, could and should do more to correct. However, all will not be lost. These special people will be successful and important contributors in whatever they chose to do in medicine. They will provide great care to their patients. Most will be important leaders in their community. Some will go on to provide strong leadership and to make memorable contributions in the broader field of health care services, industry, and even in politics. Enough for now. Again, my deepest appreciation to all of you who have meant so much to me and a final thanks to the Association for this wonderful recognition. Thank you very much.