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Considerations in Selecting Venues for the American Thoracic Society International Conference: Balancing Competing Priorities of the Society's Diverse Membership

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Considerations in Selecting Venues for the American Thoracic Society International Conference: Balancing Competing Priorities of the Society's Diverse Membership

To the Editor:

The annual American Thoracic Society (ATS) International Conference has been at the heart of our Society for more than 100 years. It is a critical meeting allowing a diverse international group of basic scientists, clinicians, educators, related healthcare professionals, and patient advocacy groups to come together to learn, network, and, most importantly, advance respiratory health. Historically, the selection of a venue for the conference has prioritized logistics that included keeping the same timing of the meeting in May, hotel and convention center capacity, national and international accessibility, and cost. This is a complex undertaking, given the number of prerequisites that must be met and the limited number of cities that satisfy our needs.

Over the past several years, there has been increasing interest among the membership in the venue selection process. This was especially evident after the U.S. Supreme Court's *Dobbs v Jackson Women's Health Organization* decision that overturned *Roe v Wade* and the subsequent legislative actions by many states to significantly limit access to reproductive health services. In addition to our public opposition to such legislation, many ATS members would like to see the Society boycott future conferences in states that adopt similar restrictive policies. In this issue of *AnnalsATS* (pp. 781–784), Lee and colleagues argue that medical societies

should reconsider holding conferences in locations that limit access to reproductive health care (1).

The Society has reviewed its selection criteria, taking into consideration members' opinions and needs within the framework of the ATS mission. The Executive Committee solicited and received significant input on this issue from others in ATS leadership, including the Board of Directors as well as the Ethics and Conflict of Interest Committee. The Ethics and Conflict of Interest Committee prepared an Ethical Framework for Strategic Positioning of Conferences, which was discussed during last fall's Leadership Summit and December Board of Directors meeting. The ATS leadership agreed that the Ethical Framework for Strategic Positioning of Conferences will be used in the site selection process.

As reiterated in the Ethical Framework for Strategic Positioning of Conferences, our number one priority in selection of a venue is the safety and well-being of our attendees. When our conference is in states that have adopted restrictive reproductive health laws, ATS will work closely with the local medical community and public officials to ensure that all attendees have immediate access to the care they need. We have already engaged in such conversations with officials in New Orleans and Orlando and will put in place protocols and procedures that will help ensure that access remains unfettered. By holding our Conference in a variety of venues, we have an opportunity to influence the public debate on controversial public health issues by being part of the community, not turning our backs on those who share our values and live and work in these communities. We plan to organize meaningful advocacy activities leading up to and on-site when visiting those states with restrictive laws in place. This helps give a voice to our members in those states as well as others who may feel uncomfortable expressing their concerns locally while considering financial factors and adhering to best business practices in the meetings industry.

The ATS leadership and staff involved in planning the International Conference are committed to listening to our members' concerns and taking all steps necessary to safeguard everyone's health

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and safety at the International Conference, such that we can continue to provide the most anticipated, exciting, and impactful annual meeting for all individuals in attendance. ■

Author disclosures are available with the text of this letter at www.atsjournals.org.

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