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(54) **Titre : ARTICLES DE CHAUSSURE A ACCES FACILE**
(54) **Title: EASY ACCESS ARTICLES OF FOOTWEAR**

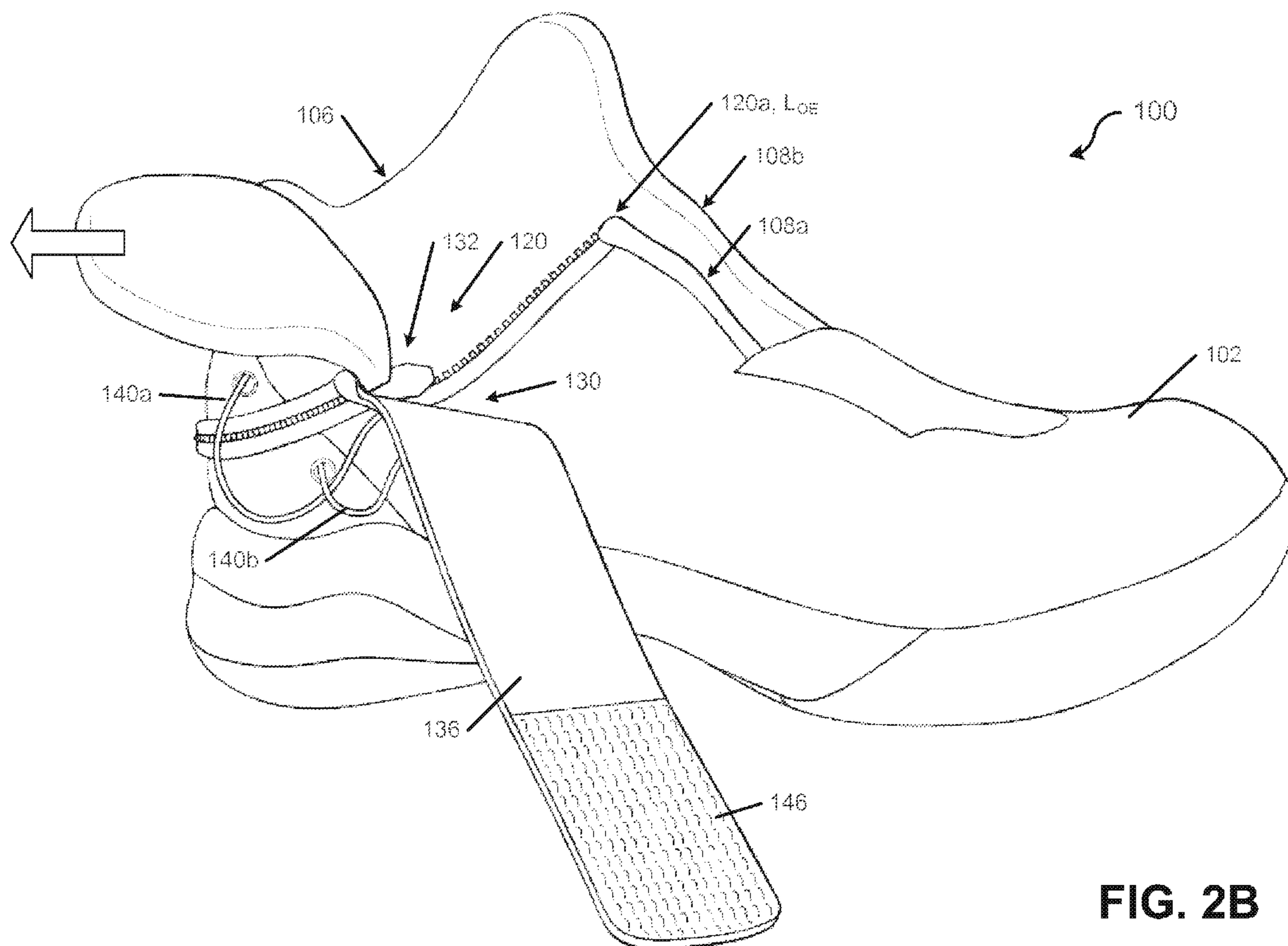
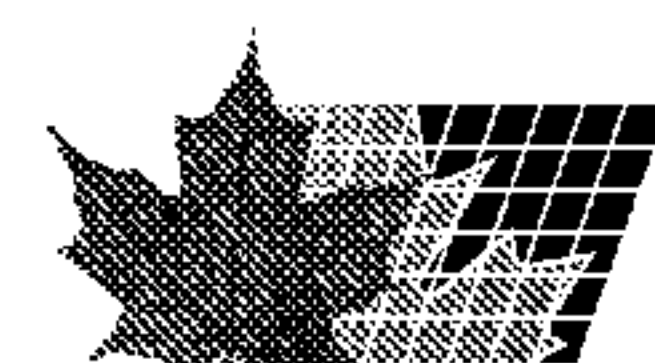


FIG. 2B

(57) **Abrégé/Abstract:**

Articles of footwear, including athletic footwear, may include: (a) an upper including an opening through which a leg of a wearer extends, wherein the upper includes a foot insertion opening extending rearwardly and downwardly from a front portion of the leg opening at least to a heel area of the upper; (b) a closure system for releasably closing the foot insertion opening and optionally tightening the shoe on the foot; and (c) a sole structure engaged with the upper. The foot insertion opening widely opens the side and/or rear area of the shoe to allow for easy insertion and removal of a foot. Such uppers can be particularly useful for hightop athletic footwear, boots, or other footwear that extends up to or at least partially over a wearer's ankles.



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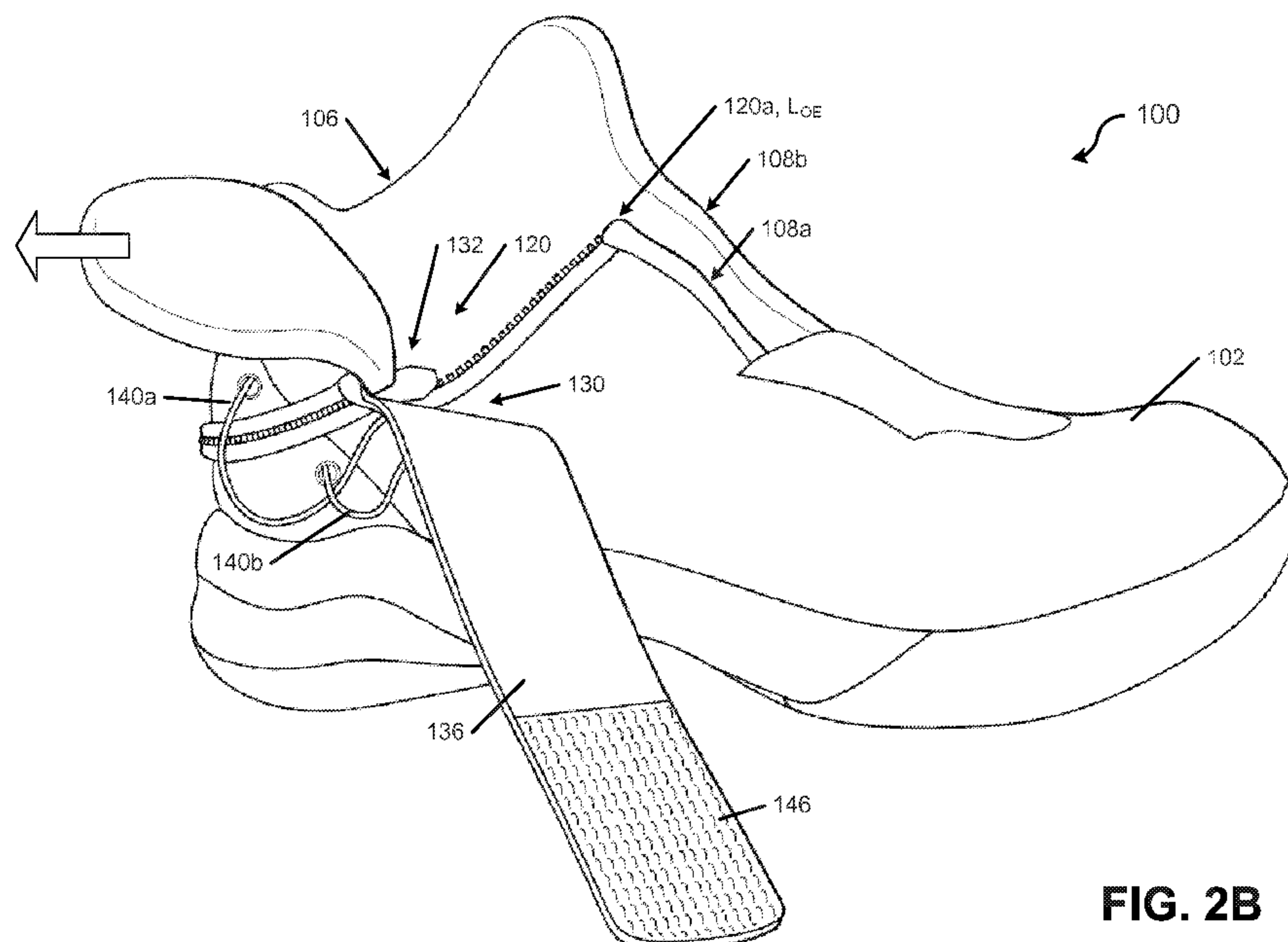
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(54) Title: EASY ACCESS ARTICLES OF FOOTWEAR

**FIG. 2B**

(57) Abstract: Articles of footwear, including athletic footwear, may include: (a) an upper including an opening through which a leg of a wearer extends, wherein the upper includes a foot insertion opening extending rearwardly and downwardly from a front portion of the leg opening at least to a heel area of the upper; (b) a closure system for releasably closing the foot insertion opening and optionally tightening the shoe on the foot; and (c) a sole structure engaged with the upper. The foot insertion opening widely opens the side and/or rear area of the shoe to allow for easy insertion and removal of a foot. Such uppers can be particularly useful for hightop athletic footwear, boots, or other footwear that extends up to or at least partially over a wearer's ankles.

EASY ACCESS ARTICLES OF FOOTWEAR

Related Application Data

- [01] This application claims priority to U.S. Patent Application No. 13/744,052, titled “Easy Access Articles of Footwear” and filed January 17, 2013. U.S. Patent Application No. 13/744,052, in its entirety, is incorporated by reference herein.

Field of the Invention

- [02] The present invention relates to the field of footwear. More specifically, aspects of the present invention pertain to articles of footwear that include foot insertion openings capable of widely opening the side and/or rear area(s) of the shoe to allow for easy insertion and removal of a foot. Footwear uppers with large openings of this type can be particularly useful for hightop athletic footwear, boots, or other footwear structures that extend up to or at least partially over a wearer’s ankles.

Background

- [03] Conventional articles of athletic footwear include two primary elements, an upper and a sole structure. The upper may provide a covering for the foot that securely receives and positions the foot with respect to the sole structure. In addition, the upper may have a configuration that protects the foot and provides ventilation, thereby cooling the foot and removing perspiration. The sole structure may be secured to a lower surface of the upper and generally is positioned between the foot and any contact surface. In addition to attenuating ground reaction forces and absorbing energy, the sole structure may provide traction and control potentially harmful foot motion, such as over pronation. The general features and configurations of uppers and sole structures are discussed in greater detail below.
- [04] The upper forms a void on the interior of the footwear for receiving the foot. The void has the general shape of the foot, and access to the void is provided at an ankle opening. Accordingly, the upper extends over the instep and toe areas of the foot, along the medial and lateral sides of the foot, and around the heel area of the foot. A

lacing system often is incorporated into the upper to selectively change the size of the ankle opening and to permit the wearer to modify certain dimensions of the upper, particularly girth, to accommodate feet with varying proportions. In addition, the upper may include a tongue that extends under the lacing system to enhance the comfort of the footwear (e.g., to modulate pressure applied to the foot by the laces), and the upper also may include a heel counter to limit or control movement of the heel.

[05] Some articles of footwear, particularly footwear with uppers extending up to ankle height or over the ankle (also called “hightop” footwear herein, e.g., “hightop” basketball sneakers or other athletic footwear, workshoes, boots, and the like), can be difficult to put on and remove. If the shoes have laces or the like across the instep area, the wearer may be required to substantially loosen the laces (or other securing mechanisms) to enable the shoe to be easily put on and/or removed. These features can substantially increase the time and frustration level involved in putting on and taking off this “hightop” style of shoes.

[06] Accordingly, there is room in the art for improvements in systems for enabling easy entry, removal, and/or securing of “hightop” footwear to the foot of wearers.

Summary of the Invention

[07] This Summary is provided to introduce some general concepts relating to this invention in a simplified form that are further described below in the Detailed Description. This Summary is not intended to identify key features or essential features of the invention.

[08] Footwear structures in accordance with at least some aspects of this invention may include foot insertion openings that widely open the side and/or rear area(s) of the shoe (e.g., the upper) to allow for easy insertion and removal of a foot.

- [09] Some more specific aspects of this invention relate to articles of footwear that may include: (a) an upper having or defining an opening through which a leg of a wearer extends, wherein the upper further includes a foot insertion opening extending rearwardly and downwardly from a front portion of the leg opening at least to a heel area of the upper; (b) a closure system for releasably closing the foot insertion opening; and (c) a sole structure engaged with the upper. The closure system further may include one or more of: (a) a strap extending at least partially around the leg (e.g., across the front) and releasably securing to the upper, (b) a lace (optionally engaged with the strap via an elastic component) extending across the instep area one or more times, and/or (c) one or more elastic elements extending across the instep area of the upper. The closure system may include structures for tightening the fit of the shoe around and securing the shoe to the wearer's foot.
- [10] While the invention is described above in terms of an entire article of footwear, additional aspects of this invention relate to uppers for use in such articles of footwear, methods of making such uppers and/or articles of footwear, and/or methods of securing such articles of footwear and/or uppers to a wearer's foot.

Brief Description of the Drawings

- [11] The foregoing Summary of the Invention, as well as the following Detailed Description of the Invention, will be better understood when considered in conjunction with the accompanying drawings in which like reference numerals refer to the same or similar elements in all of the various views in which that reference number appears.
- [12] Figs. 1A through 1E illustrate various views of an article of footwear according to some examples and aspects of this invention;
- [13] Figs. 2A through 2C include views illustrating steps involved in disengaging the article of footwear of Figs. 1A through 1E from a wearer's foot in accordance with at least some aspects of this invention;

- [14] Fig. 3A includes a view illustrating engaging the article of footwear of Figs. 1A through 1E with a wearer's foot in accordance with at least some aspects of this invention;
- [15] Figs. 3B and 3C illustrate additional features and structures that may be included in articles of footwear in accordance with some examples of this invention;
- [16] Figs. 4A through 4D illustrate example structures of guide members that may be included with article of footwear structures in accordance with at least some examples of this invention; and
- [17] Fig. 5 provides a top view of another example article of footwear in accordance with some aspects of this invention.

Detailed Description of the Invention

- [18] In the following description of various examples of footwear structures and components according to the present invention, reference is made to the accompanying drawings, which form a part hereof, and in which are shown by way of illustration various example structures and environments in which aspects of the invention may be practiced. It is to be understood that other structures and environments may be utilized and that structural and functional modifications may be made to the specifically described structures and methods without departing from the scope of the present invention.

I. General Description of Aspects of this Invention

- [19] Aspects of this invention relate to articles of footwear (e.g., athletic footwear) that include foot insertion openings that can widely open the side and/or rear area(s) of the shoe to allow for easy insertion and removal of a foot. Such footwear constructions can be particularly useful for "hightop" athletic footwear, boots, or other footwear having uppers that extend up to and/or at least partially over a wearer's ankles. More specific features and aspects of this invention will be described in more detail below.

- [20] Some aspects of this invention relate to articles of footwear that may include: (a) an upper having an opening through which a leg of a wearer extends (e.g., including a top opening, a first side edge extending forward from the top opening and along an instep area, and a second side edge opposite the first side edge and extending forward from the top opening and along the instep area), wherein the upper further includes a foot insertion opening extending rearwardly and downwardly from a front portion of the leg opening (e.g., from the first side edge) at least to a heel area of the upper; (b) a closure system for releasably closing the foot insertion opening (e.g., optionally including a zipper element or other releasable closure system); and (c) a sole structure engaged with the upper. The closure system further may include one or more of: (a) a strap extending at least partially around the leg (e.g., across the front of the leg, over the first side edge and over and beyond the second side edge, etc.) and releasably securing to the upper and/or sole structure, (b) a lace element (or an unstretchable tightening element) extending across the instep area one or more times and connecting the first and second side edges of the upper, and/or (c) one or more elastic or stretchable elements extending across the instep area and connecting the first and second side edges of the upper. This closure system may include structures for tightening the fit of the shoe around and securing the shoe to the wearer's foot.
- [21] Optionally, if desired, the strap (which optionally may be engaged with a slider element of the zipper system when the closure system includes a zipper system) may be engaged with the lace element such that pulling the strap pulls on and tightens the lace element at the instep area. In such structures, pulling on the strap to secure the shoe to a wearer's foot may function to close the closure system (e.g., zip the zipper system) and then tighten the lace element across the instep area. Optionally, in such structures, the lace element will be substantially inelastic and unstretchable, and this lace element may be engaged with the strap via one or more elastic elements (e.g., elastic band(s) that enable the strap to be pulled to a desired level of tightness). The

strap, elastic element(s), and lace element may form a continuous path around the wearer's foot (e.g., from the top instep area and around the lower leg or ankle).

- [22] In other structures, however, the strap and the lace element and/or elastic elements across the instep area may be separated from one another such that while pulling on the strap to secure the shoe to a wearer's foot may function to close the closure system (e.g., zip the zipper system and/or tighten the strap around the foot), this action does not tighten or otherwise directly affect the lace element or other closure elements across the instep area. If desired, at least some portion(s) of the strap may be elastic or stretchable to enable some tightening around the leg.
- [23] Also, if desired, in some structures in accordance with this invention, at least some portions of the closure system (e.g., at least some portions of the lace element, at least some portions of elastic component(s) of the closure system, at least some portion of the strap, etc.) may extend between different layers of the upper. Some portions of the closure system (and its tightening system structures) may be located inside the upper and/or outside the upper as well. If desired, a guide system may be provided with the upper to form and maintain a path through which at least some portions of the closure system may pass. The guide system, which may constitute one or more individual parts or components, may form a tunnel or other passageway for containing portions of the closure system. The guide system features also can help reduce or eliminate undesired interactions between the closure/securing system elements and other items.
- [24] As another potential feature, articles of footwear in accordance with at least some examples of this invention may include a grip element engaged with the upper at a location proximate to the leg opening of the shoe (e.g., at or near the top opening through which the wearer's leg extends when the shoe is secured to the foot, at or near an edge of the leg opening, at or near the foot insertion opening and/or at or near the closure system for the foot insertion opening). This grip element may be held by the

wearer as the wearer pulls the top portion of the upper (above the foot insertion opening and the closure system) to open the closure system for removal of the foot. The grip element may include tactile or grip enhancing features and/or it may provide added durability or wear resistance for this area (in view of its repeated handling for removing the shoe).

- [25] While the foot insertion opening in the shoe may extend any desired distance around the upper, in at least some examples of this invention, the foot insertion opening extends at least to a rear heel area of the upper, and in some instances to or beyond a vertical line extending upward from a rearmost point of the upper.
- [26] Given the general description of features, aspects, structures, processes, and arrangements according to certain embodiments of the invention provided above, a more detailed description of specific example articles of footwear and methods in accordance with this invention follows.

II. Detailed Description of Example Articles of Footwear According to this Invention

- [27] Referring to the figures and following discussion, various articles of footwear and features thereof in accordance with the present invention are described. The footwear depicted and discussed are athletic shoes, and the concepts disclosed with respect to various aspects of this footwear may be applied to a wide range of athletic footwear styles, including, but not limited to: basketball shoes, football shoes, hiking shoes, casual wear shoes, and the like. In addition, at least some concepts and aspects of the present invention may be applied to a wide range of non-athletic footwear, including work boots, dress boots, and the like. Accordingly, the present invention is not limited to the precise embodiments disclosed herein, but applies to footwear generally.
- [28] Figs. 1A through 1E provide various views of one example article of footwear 100 in accordance with aspects of this invention. Fig. 1A is a lateral side view, Fig. 1B is a

medial side view, Fig. 1C is a top view, Fig. 1D is a rear view, and Fig. 1E is a close up view of a portion of the closure or securing system for this example article of footwear 100. As generally shown in these figures, the article of footwear 100 includes an upper 102 and a sole structure 104 engaged with the upper 102. The upper 102 of this illustrated example is a hightop athletic shoe upper (e.g., for basketball), although other shoe styles and upper styles are possible. The upper 102 of this example may include a strobel member or other structure extending along the bottom, plantar support surface (to at least partially enclose the bottom of the foot-receiving chamber). The top of the upper 102 defines a leg opening 106 for the shoe (through which the wearer's leg extends when the shoe 100 is secured to the foot).

- [29] While it may take on any desired configuration and/or structure without departing from the invention, the sole structure 104 of this illustrated example shoe 100 includes a polymer foam midsole 104a (e.g., made from polyurethane foam, an ethylvinylacetate (EVA) foam, a lightweight foam from the LUNAR family of products (available from NIKE, Inc., of Beaverton, Oregon, etc.)). Additionally or alternatively, if desired, the midsole 104a may include one or more impact force attenuating columns (e.g., made of foam), one or more mechanical impact force attenuating components (e.g., "shock absorber" type structures), and/or one or more fluid-filled bladder structures. This midsole 104a is engaged with one or more outsole components 104b that at least partially cover the midsole 104a (e.g., by being glued or otherwise fixed to it) and provide at least a portion of a ground contact surface (e.g., with wear resistance properties, one or more traction elements, etc.). The midsole 104a and/or outsole 104b may constitute one or more independent parts, and they may extend the entire length and/or width of the article of footwear 100 or only portions thereof. Also, while shown exterior to the upper 102 in this illustrated example, some or all of the midsole 104a could be contained (or at least partially contained) within the interior chamber defined by the upper 102. If desired, the strobel mentioned above could be omitted (or at least partially omitted) and the midsole 104a could

provide the plantar support surface (or at least a portion thereof) for the article of footwear 100.

- [30] As further shown in these figures, the upper 102 of this illustrated example includes the top leg opening 106. The overall opening of this example article of footwear 100 includes a first side edge 108a (e.g., a medial side edge) extending forward from the top opening 106, downward to and along the instep area of the shoe 100. A second side edge 108b (e.g., a lateral side edge, opposite the first side edge 108a) also extends forward from the top opening 106, downward to and along the instep area of the shoe 100. The upper 102 further may include a tongue element 110 or other moderator component (e.g., a bootie type member) that lies along the front of the lower leg and ankle area and over the instep area of the shoe 100 (beneath side edges 108a, 108b and between the side edges 108a, 108b and a wearer's foot).
- [31] As further shown in Figs. 1B and 1D through 2C, this example upper 102 further includes a relatively large foot insertion opening 120 that extends rearwardly and downwardly from the first side edge 108a at least to a heel area of the upper 102. A closure/securing system 130 (including a zipper system 132) is provided for releasably closing the foot insertion opening 120 and securing the shoe 100 to a wearer's foot. These features of this example footwear structure 100 will be described in more detail below.
- [32] The foot insertion opening 120 allows the top opening 106 and upper 102 of the shoe 100 to be opened wider to allow for easy insertion of a foot. As shown in Figs. 1B and 2A, the forward end 120a of the foot insertion opening 120 begins at the first side edge 108a in an ankle/lower leg covering area of the upper 102. This forward end 120a may start at other locations along the overall shoe opening, including from the top opening portion 106 (optionally along a side of a wearer's leg) or at other locations along the first edge 108a (e.g., nearer to the top opening 106, further down toward and even to the instep area, etc.). Additionally or alternatively, the foot

insertion opening 120 could begin at (and be located at) the second side edge 108b, if desired.

- [33] As noted above, the foot insertion opening 120 in this illustrated example extends downwardly and rearwardly from the first side edge 108a. The opening 120 may extend at least to a rear heel area of the upper 102 (e.g., so the closed end 120b of the opening 120 is located in the rear heel area). As some more specific examples, the foot insertion opening 120 may extend at least to a vertical line VL extending through a rearmost point of the upper 102, or even beyond this vertical line VL (see the location of closed end 120b in Fig. 1D). The closed end 120d of the opening 120 may extend to the opposite side of the upper 102 even further than the distance shown in Fig. 1D to further open the upper 102 for receiving a foot, even to the lateral rear heel area (e.g., point P_{LRH} in Fig. 1D) or the lateral side heel area (point P_{LH} in Fig. 1A), if desired.
- [34] While the actual size of the foot insertion opening 120 may vary (e.g., depending on the shoe size, etc.), in at least some examples of this invention, the foot receiving opening 120 will extend for a length (from Points L_{OE} to L_{CE} along the zipper system 132) around at least 35% of a perimeter dimension of the top opening 106 around the heel (i.e., the dimension of the top leg opening 106 around the heel from the first side edge 108a (P_1) to the second side edge 108b (P_2)). Points P_1 and P_2 are located where the top leg opening 106 meets the side edges 108a and 108b, respectively. If a clear corner point transitioning between the top opening 106 and the side edges 108a and/or 108b is not provided in a specific footwear model at those locations, the points P_1 and P_2 may be determined as the location of a horizontal tangent point where the top opening 106 and the side edges 108a, 108b meet (when the shoe 100 sits on a horizontal surface). In some more specific examples, the foot insertion opening 120 (e.g., the longitudinal length of the zipper track) will extend around at least 40%, at least 50%, or even at least 55% of this perimeter dimension. From a more absolute dimensional point of view, in at least some examples of this invention, the length of

the foot insertion opening 120 (from Points L_{OE} to L_{CE} along the zipper track) may be at least 5 inches, and in some examples, at least 6 inches, or even at least 7 inches.

- [35] From a vertical point of view, the closed end 120b of the foot insertion opening 120 may be located at less than 35% of an overall height dimension of the upper 102 at the location of the closed end 120b. More specifically, as shown in Fig. 1D, the vertical dimension (with the shoe 100 sitting on a horizontal support surface S) from the closed end 120b to the location where the upper 102 and sole 104 meet (at the upper surface of midsole 104a, in this example), H_{CE} , is 35% or less than an overall vertical height H of the upper 102 at that location. In some more specific examples, the closed end 102b of the foot insertion opening 120 may be located at a height 30% or less, 25% or less, or even 20% or less of this overall height dimension H.
- [36] From a more absolute dimensional point of view, in at least some examples of this invention, the closed end 120b (point L_{CE}) may be located less than 1.25 inches vertically from the upper/sole junction point at that location, and in some examples, less than 1 inch, or even less than 0.75 inches from that junction point. With respect to actual height from a horizontal contact surface S, the closed end 120b (point L_{CE}) may be located less than 2.5 inches vertically from the contact surface S, and in some examples, less than 2.25 inches, less than 2 inches, or even less than 1.75 inches from that contact surface S. Additionally, with respect to actual height from a horizontal contact surface S, the open end 120a (point L_{OE}) may be located at least 3.5 inches vertically from the contact surface S, and in some examples, at least 3.75 inches, at least 4 inches, or at least 4.25 inches from the contact surface S. The vertical spacing distance between the closed end 120b (point L_{CE}) and the open end 120a (point L_{OE}) (H_{DIFF} in Fig. 1E) may vary without departing from this invention. In some more specific examples, the vertical height differential between points L_{CE} and L_{OE} (H_{DIFF}) may be at least 1.5 inches, and in some examples, at least 1.75 inches, at least 2 inches, and even at least 2.25 inches.

- [37] Various aspects and example features of footwear closure/securing systems (e.g., system 130) for articles of footwear according to at least some examples of this invention now will be described in more detail. As shown in Figs. 1A through 3A, this example article of footwear 100 includes a zipper system 132 engaged with the upper 102 on opposite side edges of the foot insertion opening 120 for at least partially closing the foot insertion opening 120. In this example construction, the zipper system 132 fully closes the foot insertion opening 120 (i.e., extends from Points L_{OE} to L_{CE}). Thus, zipper system 132 may have a length of at least 35% of the perimeter dimension of the top opening 106 around the heel discussed above (and in some examples, this length will be at least 40%, at least 50%, or even at least 55% of this perimeter dimension). From a more absolute dimensional point of view, in at least some examples of this invention, the length of the zipper system 132 (from Points L_{OE} to L_{CE} along the zipper track) may be at least 5 inches, and in some examples, at least 6 inches, or even at least 7 inches. Releasable closure systems other than zippers could be used, if desired, in some constructions according to some aspects of this invention.
- [38] The slider element 134 of the zipper system 132 in this illustrated example is engaged with (or integrally formed to include) a strap 136. The strap 136 in this illustrated example extends from the medial side of the upper 102, over the first side edge 108a, beyond the second side edge 108b, and releasably secures to the lateral side of the upper 102 (e.g., via a hook-and-loop type fastener system 146, via a buckle type assembly, via other mechanical connectors, etc.). The strap 136 and its securing features help keep the zipper system 132 closed (e.g., keeping slider element 134 at or near point L_{OE}) and help secure the shoe 100 to the wearer's foot in a snug and comfortable manner.
- [39] The closure/securing system 130 of this example footwear structure 100 further includes a lace element 138 extending across the instep area of the shoe 100 and connecting the first side edge 108a and the second side edge 108b of the upper 102. If

desired, this lace element 138 may engage the upper 102 through eyelets or eyelet type openings formed in the upper 102 (e.g., near side edges 108a, 108b) in a conventional manner as is commonly known and used in the footwear art. Additionally or alternatively, the lace element 138 also may be tied at the front/top of the upper 102 (e.g., at the instep and/or front leg area) in manners that are known and used in the footwear art. The lace element 138, at least in part, may constitute a non-stretchable cord, textile, plastic, fiber, metal, or other component. The terms “non-stretchable” or “unstretchable” as used herein in this context mean a material that stretches less than 10% of its length (i.e., less than 0.2 inches for a 2 inch length of the material), when a tensile force of 10 lbs is applied to a 2 inch length of the material.

[40] In this illustrated structure 100, the lace element 138 engages with strap members 138a that may extend at least partially around the wearer's foot and/or at least partially beneath a plantar support surface of the shoe. If desired, at least some of strap members 138a may extend completely around the plantar support surface of the shoe 100, from edge 108a to edge 108b. Lace engagement structures and strap members 138a of this type are described in U.S. Patent Appln. Publ. Nos. 2012/0011744 and 2012/0198720, which applications are entirely incorporated herein by reference. Any of the wrap-around foot engaging systems and/or lace engaging structures described in these patent publications may be used in connection with the footwear structure 100 according to this invention. These types of wrap-around foot engaging systems and/or lace engaging structures can help provide a very comfortable, adaptive, and secure fit of an article of footwear to a wearer's foot.

[41] The closure/securing system 130 of this example footwear structure 100 includes additional features. As illustrated in Figs. 1B and 1E, the strap 136 is engaged with two stretchable or elastic members 140a and 140b (although one or more elastic members may be used without departing from this invention). The elastic members 140a and 140b help assure that the strap 136 is pulled tightly to engage the strap 136 around the wearer's foot, e.g., as shown in Fig. 1E. While not a requirement, as

shown in the illustrated example, portions of elastic members 140a and 140b extend between layers of the upper (e.g., as shown Fig. 1B). The elastic members 140a and/or 140b may extend through guide system 160 (also called a “guide element” or “guide member” herein), as will be explained in more detail below in conjunction with Figs. 4A through 4D (and potential guide system 160 locations and tracks are shown in dash-double dot lines in Figs. 1A, 1B, and 1D). The term “stretchable” as used herein in this context means a material that stretches at least 25% of its length (i.e., at least 0.5 inches for a 2 inch length of the material) when a tensile force of 10 lbs is applied to a 2 inch length of the material. An “elastic” material is a “stretchable” material that returns at least substantially (i.e., at least 95%) to its original length when the 10 lb force is released. Additionally or alternatively, if desired, at least a portion of the strap 136 may be stretchable (in place of or in addition to any stretch provided by the elastic members 140a, 140b).

- [42] If desired, the elastic member(s) (e.g., 140a, 140b) or other strap 136 tightening or securing structures may be fixedly engaged with the shoe 100 (e.g., with the upper 102, with the sole structure 104, between the upper 102 and sole structure 104, etc.) to provide a support for pulling the strap 136 and stretching the elastic member(s) 140a, 140b and/or strap 136. Such a system may be used, for example, if the lace element 138 is of a conventional design (e.g., separately tied by the wearer) or if the lace element 138 is replaced with another type of instep closure system, such as one or more elastic bands (as described in more detail below in conjunction with Fig. 5) or other elements. The example footwear structure 100 of Figs. 1A through 1E, however, has a different construction. As shown in Fig. 1C, in this example structure 100, the two opposing ends of lace element 138 extend between layers of the upper 102 at a location along the second side edge 108b of the upper 102. Thus, in this example structure, the lace 138 engages more eyelet or other lace engaging elements 138a on the first side 108a than on the second side 108b, and the free ends of the lace element 138 come close together and extend along the upper 102 on the second side

108b. If desired, the lace element 138 may extend through a guide system 160, as will be explained in more detail below in conjunction with Figs. 4A through 4D. These ends of lace element 138 may engage (directly or indirectly) with free ends of elastic members 140a and 140b (e.g., at a location inside or between layers of the upper 102) such that pulling the strap 136 to stretch the elastic members 140a and 140b applies a tensile force to pull and tighten the lace element 138 at and across the instep area.

- [43] Therefore, the closure/securing system 130 in accordance with this illustrated example footwear structure 100 includes: (a) a first portion (e.g., the lace element 138) that extends between the first side edge 108a and the second side edge 108b at the instep area (this lace element 138 may tighten a strap system that wraps around the sides and at least to a plantar support area of the shoe), (b) a second portion (e.g., at least a portion of lace element 138 and/or at least a portion of elastic members 140a, 140b) that extends past the second side edge 108b (and optionally inside or between layers of the upper 102) and around the heel area of the upper 102, and (c) a third portion (e.g., strap 136) that extends past the first side edge 108a and over the second side edge 108b to releasably engage the upper 102 (e.g., via a hook-and-loop type fastener arrangement). The first, second, and third portions of the closure/securing system 130 may form a continuous path (e.g., from the front, instep area of the shoe 100 to the free end of strap 136). At least some of the first and/or second portions of the closure/securing system 130 may be unstretchable, while at least some of at least one of the second and/or third portions of the closure/securing system 130 may be elastic or stretchable. If desired, at least some of the first and/or second portions of the closure/securing system 130 (e.g., at least some of lace element 138 and/or elastic members 140a, 140b) may extend inside the upper 102 and/or between layers of the upper 102. Additionally or alternatively, if desired, at least some of the third portion of the closure/securing system 130 (e.g., the strap 136) may extend inside the upper 102 and/or between layers of the upper 102.

- [44] Operation of the closure/securing system 130 will be described in more detail below in conjunction with Figs. 2A through 3A. Figs. 1A through 1E illustrate the article of footwear 100 with the closure/securing system 130 engaged and pulled tight, e.g., as it would be when secured to a wearer's foot (not shown). In this arrangement, the elastic members 140a, 140b (or other elastic portions) may be pulled tight and held in place by a releasable engagement between the strap 136 and the upper 102 (or sole structure 104), e.g., via a hook-and-loop fastener system 146, via a buckle assembly, via another type of releasable connection, etc.). This configuration also may pull the slider 134 of the zipper system 132 to the open end 120a of the foot insertion opening 120, thereby closing the foot insertion opening 120.
- [45] To remove the shoe 100 from the foot, first the strap 136 is released from its releasable connection to upper 102 and/or sole structure 104 (e.g., by disconnecting the components of the hook-and-loop fastener 146). This action causes the elastic members 140a, 140b to return back toward their unstretched condition. The elastic portions of the closure/securing system 130 (e.g., elements 140a, 140b, and/or elastic in the strap 136) may be sized so that when the tensile force is released in this manner, retraction of the elastic components will cause the slider element 134 of the zipper system 132 to begin moving down the track of the zipper 132 (at least if the slider element 134 had been extended to the end 120a of the zipper track). As an example, this release of tensile force may move the slider element 134 at least a few teeth down the zipper track (e.g., 1 to 10 teeth), as shown in Fig. 2A. This tensile force release also may, at least in part, loosen the lace element 138 across the instep area of the shoe 100 (e.g., if the strap 136 and elastic members 140a, 140b are operatively coupled with the lace element 138).
- [46] If desired, one could continue to open the zipper system 132 by pulling the strap 136 to move the slider 134 further down the zipper track (optionally to closed end 120b). Alternatively, the wearer can grasp the upper 102 at a location above and/or rearward of the foot insertion opening 120 and pull the top portion of the upper 102 rearward to

move the slider element 134 down the zipper track (and to essentially unwrap the upper 102 from around the wearer's leg). See Fig. 2B. As shown in Fig. 2C, this action moves the slider element 134 rearward and downward toward and/or to the closed end 120b of the foot insertion opening 120 and opens up a large, wide area for removal and insertion of a foot. Optionally, if desired, the upper 102 may include a grip enhancing and/or wear/abrasion resistant element 144 at a location where the user will tend to grip the upper 102 during this closure/securing system 130 loosening phase. In addition or as an alternative to a layer of grip enhancing and/or wear/abrasion resistant material, element 144 also may include a projecting tab (e.g., of fabric or plastic) or a handle element extending outward from the upper (capable of being grasped).

[47] To put the shoe 100 on, the shoe 100 can start with the closure/securing system 130 in the arrangement shown in Fig. 2C, and the user can insert his/her foot into the shoe 100 through the opened closure/securing system 130. If desired, the tongue element 110 may be secured to the upper 102, e.g., along one or both of the side edges 108a, 108b, to help prevent the tongue element 110 from falling into the interior of the shoe 100 (and thus being in the way when the user inserts his/her foot). This can be accomplished, for example, using sewing or stitching (to tack the tongue element 110 to one or both edges 108a, 108b), using one or more elastic type straps 110a (so that the tongue element 110 is fixed to the edge(s) but can still be stretched forward with respect to the opening area), or in other manners. As other potential options, the tongue element 110 can be integrally joined along the side edges 108a, 108b and/or optionally made at least in part from a stretchable or extensible material, such as from a SPANDEX type stretchable/elastomeric fabric (e.g., like an internal bootie element), with a gusseted construction along at least one of the side edges 108a, 108b, etc.

[48] Once the shoe 100 is positioned on the foot, the strap 136 can be pulled forward and upward as shown in Fig. 3A, which action moves the slider 134 of the zipper system 132 up the zipper track toward the open end 120a of the foot insertion opening 120, to

thereby close the foot insertion opening 120. The strap 136 then can be pulled tight and wrapped around the front of the ankle/leg, over the first and second side edges 108a, 108b, and secured at the opposite side of the upper 102 from the main part of the zipper element 132 (e.g., using hook-and-loop fastener 146). This strap 136 tightening action also may, at least in part, tighten the lace element 138 across the instep area of the shoe 100 (if the strap 136 and elastic members 140a, 140b are operatively coupled with the lace element 138).

[49] While the embodiment shown in Figs. 1A through 3A show the shoe 100 with the zipper element 132 primarily on the medial side of the upper 102 (and the strap 136 wrapping from the medial side to the lateral side), the opposite configuration also is possible (with the zipper element 132 primarily on the lateral side of the upper 102 and the strap 136 wrapping from the lateral side to the medial side). As another potential option, if desired, one shoe 100 of a pair of shoes may have the zipper element 132 primarily on the medial side of the upper 102 (and the strap 136 wrapping from the medial side to the lateral side) and the other shoe of the pair may have the opposite configuration (with the zipper element 132 primarily on the lateral side of the upper 102 and the strap 136 wrapping from the lateral side to the medial side).

[50] Optionally, if desired, and as illustrated in Fig. 3B, the rear heel area of the sole 104 and/or the upper 102 may include a handle or tab 150 that the user can grasp to help pull the shoe 100 all the way onto the foot (and get the toes down to the end of the shoe 100). Other structures may be provided for this purpose, if desired. For example, the handle or tab 150 may be shaped and positioned (e.g., of sufficient length to contact the floor) so that the user can step down on it (or otherwise apply force to it) to hold the shoe 100 in place while toes of the foot being inserted are pushed into the upper 102. As another example, as shown in Figs. 3B and 3C, the upper 102 or sole structure 104 may include a bearing element 152 along a side that extends sideways to allow a rearward force to be applied to the shoe 100 (e.g., by the

opposite foot or leg; by a wall, table, or chair; etc.). Optionally, this type of bearing member 152 may be mounted to fold forward along the side of the upper 102 and/or sole structure 104, e.g., on a hinge 154, or to retract into the sole structure 104 (or between the upper 102 and the sole structure 104), e.g., by a spring loaded mount.

[51] As mentioned above, if desired, at least some portions of the lace element 138 and/or the elastic members 140a, 140b may extend inside or between layers of the upper 102. As another option, if desired, these members may at least partially extend around the heel area of the shoe 100 around the exterior surface of the upper 102. In such structures, at least some portions of the lace element 138, the elastic members 140a, 140b, and even the strap 136 may extend through a guide system 160. The guide system 160 can help maintain the lace element 138, the elastic members 140a, 140b, and/or the strap 136 in desired position(s) with respect to the upper 102 and/or help maintain a clear path so that these components can be pulled tight when securing the shoe 100 to a wearer foot. The guide system 160 also can help conceal these components to avoid unnecessary or undesired contact and/or interaction with other objects.

[52] Figs. 4A through 4D show cross sectional views of various potential examples of guide element 160 structures. The guide element(s) 160 may be provided along at least portions of the desired tracks of lace element 138, elastic members 140a, 140b, and/or strap 136, as shown in dash-double dot lines in Figs. 1A, 1B, and 1D.

[53] Fig. 4A shows a guide member 160 provided as a tubular member between two layers 102a and 102b of upper material (e.g., between a spacer mesh inner layer and an abrasion resistant TPU or synthetic leather outer layer). The guide member 160 may be made from a rigid or flexible material, e.g., plastic, fabric, or textile materials. The guide member 160 further may include structures 162 that enable the guide member 160 to be engaged with one or both of the upper layers 102a, 102b, e.g., such as by sewing or stitching, by adhesives or cements, by fusing techniques, etc. An internal

area 164 defined by the guide member 160 houses at least portions of the lace element 138 and/or elastic members 140a, 140b (and/or optionally, at least a portion of the strap 136), depending on the location of the guide member 160 around the shoe 100.

- [54] Fig. 4B shows a similar two layer upper construction in which the guide member 160' has an open side and a surface of one of the upper layers (e.g., layer 102b, in this example) defines one side of the guide member internal area 164' (in which the elements 138, 140a, and/or 140b are contained). Again, the guide member 160' may be engaged with one or both of the upper layers 102a, 102b, e.g., at structures 162', such as by sewing or stitching, by adhesives or cements, by fusing techniques, etc.
- [55] Fig. 4C shows a guide member 160'' engaged with a single layer 102a of an upper. Again, the guide member 160'' has an open side and a surface of upper layer 102a defines one side of the guide member internal area 164'' (in which the elements 138, 140a, and/or 140b are contained). Again, the guide member 160'' may be engaged with upper layer 102a, e.g., at structures 162'', such as by sewing or stitching, by adhesives or cements, by fusing techniques, etc. In this example construction, the guide member 160'' extends outward from the upper layer 102a, and the guide member 160'' may be oriented on an interior or an exterior surface of this upper layer 102a.
- [56] Fig. 4D also shows a guide member 160''' engaged with a single layer 102a of an upper. In this example structure, a thin cover element 166 is provided along at least some portion of a longitudinal length of the guide member 160''' (to close off and partially define internal area 164''' in which the elements 138, 140a, and/or 140b are contained). This cover element 166 may be formed from any desired type of material, including, for example, a rigid or flexible polymeric material, a fabric or textile material, etc. Again, the guide member 160''' may be engaged with upper layer 102a, e.g., at structures 162''', such as by sewing or stitching, by adhesives or cements, by fusing techniques, etc. In this example construction, the guide member 160''' extends

or recesses into the upper layer 102a, and the guide member 160''' may be oriented on an interior or an exterior surface of this upper layer 102a. In some structures, if desired, the cover element 166 may be omitted, at least over some portions of the guide member structure 160'''.

[57] While always shown including two elements 138, 140a, and/or 140b in Figs. 4A through 4D, guide elements of any of these types may include a single portion of the closure/securing system 130 or more than two components. For example, as shown in Figs. 1A, 1B, and 1D, the guide member may divide or separate at the rear heel portion (or other portion) of the shoe structure 100, and a single element 138, 140a, and/or 140b may be provided in at least some of the guide members (e.g., on opposite sides of zipper system 132). The guide system need not extend continuously along the entire path shown in Figs. 1A, 1B, and 1D, but it may be discontinuous (e.g., in multiple separate parts, e.g., akin to belt loop type structures) or otherwise shorter than the entire path.

[58] If necessary or desired, in any of the constructions of Figs. 4A through 4D, the interior wall of internal area 164, the elements 138, 140a, and/or 140b, the cover element 166, and/or the surface of the upper 102 defining the internal area 164 may be treated so as to reduce sliding friction between the various parts contained in the internal area (e.g., so that the elements 138, 140a, and/or 140b move more freely and easily when pulled or released). As some more specific examples, if desired, the treatment may include a polytetrafluoroethylene coating or infusion, graphite coating or infusion, treatment with other lubricants, etc. Additionally or alternatively, if desired, at least portions of the internal wall of the internal area 164 of the guide element 160, the cover member 166, and/or the surface of the upper 102 may be made from a material having a low coefficient of friction with respect to elements 138, 140a, and/or 140b. The elements (e.g., 138, 140a, 140b) contained within the internal area 164 may be made from materials or treated to have a low coefficient of friction with respect to one another (or with respect to other surfaces and/or structures within

internal area 164). These features can help prevent elements 138, 140a, and/or 140b from binding and/or sticking when the closure/securing system 130 is tightened or released.

[59] In footwear structures 100 in which instep securing element(s) (e.g., non-elastic or unstretchable lace elements 138) directly engage with the pull strap 136 (e.g., via elastic stretch components 140a, 140b), the location of the transition between the unstretchable lace elements 138 and the elastic pull strap components 140a, 140b may occur at any desired location around the upper structure 102. As some more specific examples, this transition may occur in the lateral side heel area (e.g., see Fig. 1A, point P₄), in the rear heel area (e.g., Fig. 1D, points P₅), or even in the medial side heel area (e.g., Fig. 1B, points P₆). This transition also may occur within the guide elements 160 (if any), between layers of the upper 102 (if multiple layers are present), inside the upper 102, and/or outside of the upper 102. When two or more securing component (138, 140a, 140b) paths are provided around the upper 102, the transition(s) between unstretchable and elastic materials (if any) may occur at the same or different locations around the upper 102.

[60] Fig. 5 illustrates another example article of footwear structure 500 in accordance with some examples of this invention. While the footwear structure 500 of Fig. 5 is similar to that of Figs. 1A through 1D, in this illustrated example structure 500, the lace elements 138 from Fig. 1C are replaced by one or more stretchable or elastic bands 502 that extend across the instep opening from side edge 108a to side edge 108b. The elastic band(s) 502 allow the size of the instep area of the shoe 500 to expand as the foot moves inward and then return to or toward their original size to help maintain the shoe in a tightened condition on the wearer's foot. If desired, elastic bands 502 may engage straps 138a for wrap-around and adaptive fit type components of the types described above in conjunction with Fig. 1C (and as described in U.S. Patent Appln. Publ. Nos. 2012/0011744 and 2012/0198720).

- [61] In this example structure 500, the strap 136 still is engaged with a slider element 134 of zipper system 132 and is mounted on one or more elastic elements 140a, 140b that extend at least partially around the wearer's foot to help secure the shoe to the wearer's foot. The elastic element(s) 140a, 140b in this illustrated example shoe structure 500, however, do not extend around to and/or engage the closure/securing element(s) 502 provided at the instep area of the shoe. Rather, in this shoe structure 500, the elastic element(s) 140a, 140b are fixed to one of the upper 102 and/or the sole structure 104 and/or held between the upper 102 and sole structure 104. The fixing point for the end(s) of elastic element(s) 140a, 140b may be at any desired location around the shoe structure 500, such as in the lateral heel area, in the rear heel area, and/or in the medial heel area, etc. (e.g., in the general areas designated as points P₄, P₅, and P₆ in the discussion above with respect to Figs. 1A through 1E, between the upper and the sole structure, etc.). Additionally or alternatively, if desired, the strap 136 could be made at least partially from a stretchable material and used to tighten the shoe 500 to the wearer's leg.
- [62] The shoe 500 of Fig. 5 may include strap 136, zipper system 132, and/or elastic elements 140a, 140b of the types described above in Figs. 1A through 1D, and these components may operate in a manner the same as or similar to those described above for the structure 100 of Figs. 1A through 1D (e.g., as described in conjunction with Figs. 2A-3A) except loosening of the strap 136 and relaxation of the tensile force in elements 140a, 140b will not affect tightness across the instep area. Nonetheless, the zipper system 132 and the closure system 130 may be opened and closed in the same general manner.
- [63] Those skilled in the art will understand that the structures, options, and/or alternatives for the footwear structures described herein, including the features of the various different embodiments of the invention, may be used in any desired combinations, subcombinations, and the like, without departing from the invention. For example, if desired, the elastic band(s) 502 of Fig. 5 may be used in conjunction with the lace

element 138 of Figs. 1A through 3A. As another example, the footwear structure 500 of Fig. 5 may include the handle and/or bearing members of Figs. 3B and 3C without departing from this invention. The example footwear structure 500 of Fig. 5 also may include one or more of the guide element structures 160 and arrangements as shown in Figs. 4A through 4D, if desired. Other combinations of specific features, components, and combinations also may be used without departing from this invention.

- [64] Further variations from the illustrated structures may be made in the closure/securing system 130. As some additional examples, if desired, more or fewer (or no) elastic bands 140a, 140b may be provided without departing from this invention. Additionally or alternatively, the elastic bands 140a, 140b, when present, may have different sizes, cross sectional shapes, attachment location(s) to the strap 136, and the like from the specifically illustrated structures, and the bands 140a, 140b on a single shoe 100 (when multiple bands are present) may have the same or different constructions. The band(s) 140a, 140b also may extend around the shoe 100 in different directions from those illustrated, including at different relative directions and/or angles from one another. The band(s) 140a, 140b need not extend inside and/or between layers of the upper 102 as shown in Fig. 1B, but if they do, the location(s) at which the band(s) 140a, 140b move from an exterior location to an interior location with respect to the upper 102 may vary (e.g., the location(s) may be nearer to the strap 136, at higher and/or lower locations with respect to the zipper system 132, further around the rear heel area, more toward the opposite side of the shoe, at wider spaced apart locations around the perimeter, etc.). Also, the entry location for the band(s) 140a, 140b (i.e., the opening through which the band(s) 140a, 140b extend inside the upper 102) may have shapes other than round, such as square, rectangular, triangular, other polygonal shapes, oval or elliptical shaped, star shaped, cross shaped, logo shaped, irregularly shaped, etc. More than one band 140a, 140b may extend through a single opening to the interior of the upper 102, if desired (e.g.,

at a location beyond the end of the zipper system 132). When multiple openings for this purpose are present in a shoe construction, the individual openings may have the same or different shapes from one another. The strap 136 also may be sized, shaped, and oriented differently from the illustrated structures and arrangements, if desired. The various options noted above also may be used in any desired combinations or subcombinations without departing from this invention. Accordingly, a wide variety of options and design choices are available for the various structures of the closure/securing system 130.

[65] The lace component 138 and its orientation on a shoe also may differ without departing from this invention. For example, as noted above, the lace component 138 may engage more conventional eyelets or holes through the upper 102 at the instep area. The lace component 138 also may have different sizes, cross sectional shapes, and/or cross the instep area of the shoe 100 a different number of times from that shown without departing from this invention. Also, while the shoe 100 of Fig. 1C shows both ends of lace component 138 extending inside the upper 102 at the lateral side of the shoe 100, other arrangements are possible without departing from this invention. For example, both ends of lace component 138 could extend inside the upper 102 at the medial side of the shoe 100. As another example, the opposite ends of lace component 138 could extend inside the upper 102 at opposite sides of the shoe 100 (and potentially engage different straps 136 or one of the ends of the lace component 138 could wrap around a direction change element provided on or with the shoe 100 to change direction and engage the same strap 136 as the other end). As yet another example, if desired, the ends of lace component 138 could extend along the outside of the upper 102 (on one or both sides, optionally at least partially within a guide member 160). Accordingly, many variations on the lace structure 138 and arrangement are possible without departing from this invention.

[66] The tension applying systems (e.g., to tighten lace element 138 and/or strap 136) also may have other structures without departing from this invention. For example, a

pulley doubler type system may be provided, e.g., to reduce the pulling force needed to apply tensile force to the lace element 138. As additional options, other tension applying devices could be provided, e.g., at the front, instep, and/or side ankle areas of the shoe 100, such as a rotary “take up” mechanism that winds to roll up excess lace element 138 (and thereby apply tensile force to the lace element 138). Such tension applying devices may replace the strap 136 and elastic bands 140a, 140b, in at least some footwear structures and/or they may be engaged with the zipper slider 134, if desired, to pull the zipper slider 134 downwardly and rearwardly when the tension is released (e.g., to perform the tension release functions with respect to the zipper slider 134 described above in conjunction with Fig. 2A).

III. Conclusion

[67] The present invention is disclosed above and in the accompanying drawings with reference to a variety of embodiments. The purpose served by the disclosure, however, is to provide an example of the various features and concepts related to the invention, not to limit the scope of the invention. One skilled in the relevant art will recognize that numerous variations and modifications may be made to the embodiments described above without departing from the scope of the present invention, as defined by the appended claims.

What is claimed is:

1. An article of footwear, comprising:

an upper including a top opening, a first side edge extending forward from the top opening and along an instep area, and a second side edge opposite the first side edge and extending forward from the top opening and along the instep area, wherein the upper includes a foot insertion opening extending rearwardly and downwardly from the first side edge at least to a heel area of the upper;

a zipper system for at least partially closing the foot insertion opening engaged with the upper; and

a sole structure engaged with the upper.

2. An article of footwear according to claim 1, further comprising:

a strap engaged with a slider element of the zipper system, wherein the strap extends beyond the second side edge and releasably secures to the upper.

3. An article of footwear according to claim 1, further comprising:

a lace element extending across the instep area and connecting the first side edge and the second side edge of the upper; and

a strap engaged with a slider element of the zipper system, wherein the strap extends beyond the second side edge and releasably secures to the upper, wherein the lace element is engaged with the strap such that pulling the strap to a location to releasably secure to the upper tightens the lace element at the instep area.

4. An article of footwear according to claim 1, further comprising:

a lace element extending across the instep area and connecting the first side edge and the second side edge of the upper; and

a strap engaged with a slider element of the zipper system, wherein the strap extends beyond the second side edge and releasably secures to the upper, and wherein the lace element is engaged with the strap via a first elastic element, and wherein pulling the strap to a location to releasably secure to the upper places the first elastic element under tension and tightens the lace element at the instep area.

5. An article of footwear according to claim 1, further comprising:
a tightening system for tightening the upper to a wearer's foot, the tightening system including:
a first portion extending between the first side edge and the second side edge
at the instep area,
a second portion extending past the second side edge and around the heel area
of the upper, and
a third portion engaged with a slider element of the zipper system.
6. An article of footwear according to claim 5, wherein the first, second, and third portions of the tightening system form a continuous path.
7. An article of footwear according to claim 5, wherein at least some of the first portion of the tightening system is unstretchable, and wherein at least some of the second portion of the tightening system is elastic.
8. An article of footwear according to claim 7, wherein the third portion of the tightening system includes a strap that extends from the slider element beyond the second side edge and releasably secures to the upper at a location beyond the second side edge.
9. An article of footwear according to claim 7, wherein at least some of the first portion of the tightening system extends between layers of the upper.
10. An article of footwear according to claim 7, wherein at least some of the second portion of the tightening system extends between layers of the upper.
11. An article of footwear according to claim 7, wherein at least some of the first portion of the tightening system extends between layers of the upper, and wherein at least some of the second portion of the tightening system extends between layers of the upper.
12. An article of footwear according to claim 5, further comprising:
a guide system engaged with the upper, wherein at least some of the first portion of the tightening system passes through the guide system.
13. An article of footwear according to claim 5, further comprising:

a guide system engaged with the upper, wherein at least some of the second portion of the tightening system passes through the guide system.

14. An article of footwear according to claim 5, further comprising:

a guide system engaged with the upper, wherein at least some of the first portion of the tightening system and at least some of the second portion of the tightening system passes through the guide system.

15. An article of footwear according to claim 1, further comprising:

a grip element engaged with the upper at a location proximate to the top opening and the first edge and above the zipper system.

16. An article of footwear according to claim 1, wherein the first side edge is located on a medial side of the upper, wherein the second side edge is located on a lateral side of the upper, and wherein the foot insertion opening extends at least to a vertical line extending through a rearmost point of the upper.

17. An article of footwear according to claim 1, wherein the foot insertion opening extends beyond a vertical line extending through a rearmost point of the upper.

18. An article of footwear according to claim 1, wherein the first side edge is located on a medial side of the upper and the second side edge is located on a lateral side of the upper.

19. An article of footwear according to claim 1, further comprising:

a first elastic element extending between and connecting the first side edge and the second side edge of the upper.

20. An article of footwear according to claim 19, further comprising:

a strap engaged with a slider element of the zipper system, wherein the strap extends beyond the second side edge and releasably secures to the upper.

21. An article of footwear, comprising:

an upper including a top opening, a first side edge extending forward from the top opening and along an instep area, and a second side edge opposite the first side edge and

extending forward from the top opening and along the instep area, wherein the upper includes a foot insertion opening extending rearwardly and downwardly from the first side edge at least to a heel area of the upper;

a closure system for releasably closing the foot insertion opening; and
a sole structure engaged with the upper.

22. An article of footwear according to claim 21, wherein the closure system includes a strap that extends over the first side edge, beyond the second side edge, and releasably secures to the upper.

23. An article of footwear according to claim 21, further comprising:
a lace element extending across the instep area and connecting the first side edge and the second side edge of the upper, wherein the closure system includes a strap that extends from a first side of the upper, beyond the second side edge, and releasably secures to the upper at a location beyond the second side edge, and wherein the lace element is engaged with the strap such that pulling the strap tightens the lace element at the instep area.

24. An article of footwear according to claim 23, wherein the lace element is engaged with the strap via a first elastic element, and wherein pulling the strap to the location to releasably secure to the upper places the first elastic element under tension.

25. An article of footwear according to claim 21, wherein the first side edge is located on a medial side of the upper, wherein the second side edge is located on a lateral side of the upper, and wherein the foot insertion opening extends at least to a vertical line extending through a rearmost point of the upper.

26. An article of footwear according to claim 21, wherein the foot insertion opening extends beyond a vertical line extending through a rearmost point of the upper.

27. An article of footwear according to claim 21, further comprising:
a first elastic element extending between and connecting the first side edge and the second side edge of the upper.

28. An article of footwear according to claim 27, wherein the closure system includes a strap that extends over the first side edge, beyond the second side edge, and releasably engages the upper.

29. An article of footwear, comprising:

a hightop upper including a leg opening, wherein the upper includes a foot insertion opening extending rearwardly and downwardly from a front portion of the leg opening to a heel area of the upper;

a closure system for releasably closing the foot insertion opening; and

a sole structure engaged with the upper.

30. An article of footwear according to claim 29, wherein the closure system includes a strap that extends over the second side edge and releasably secures to the upper.

31. An article of footwear according to claim 30, wherein the closure system includes a zipper system that opens and closes the foot insertion opening, and wherein the strap engages a slider element of the zipper system.

32. An article of footwear according to claim 29, further comprising:

a grip element engaged with the upper at a location proximate to the leg opening and above the foot insertion opening.

33. An article of footwear according to claim 29, wherein the foot insertion opening extends beyond a vertical line extending through a rearmost point of the upper.

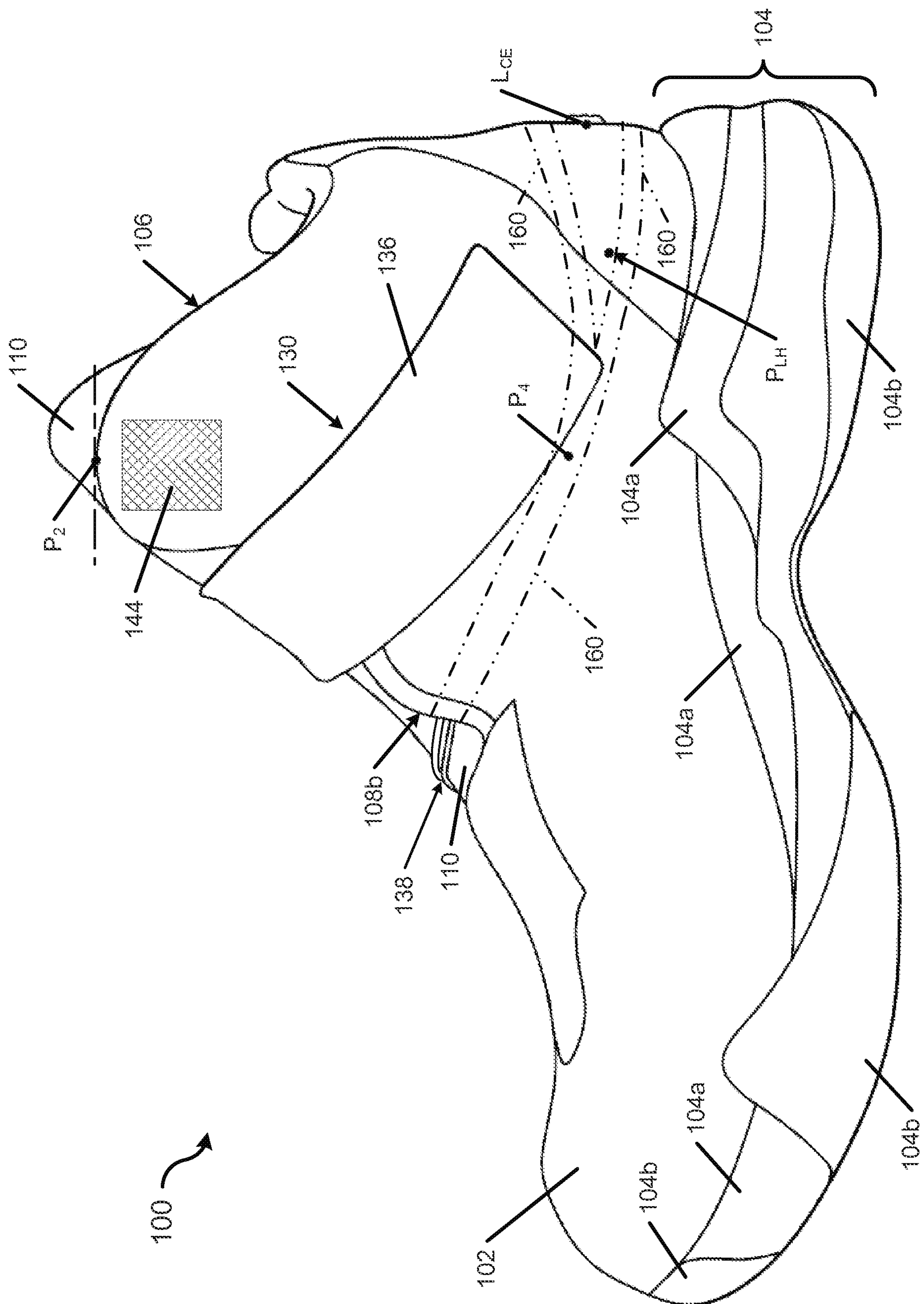


FIG. 1A

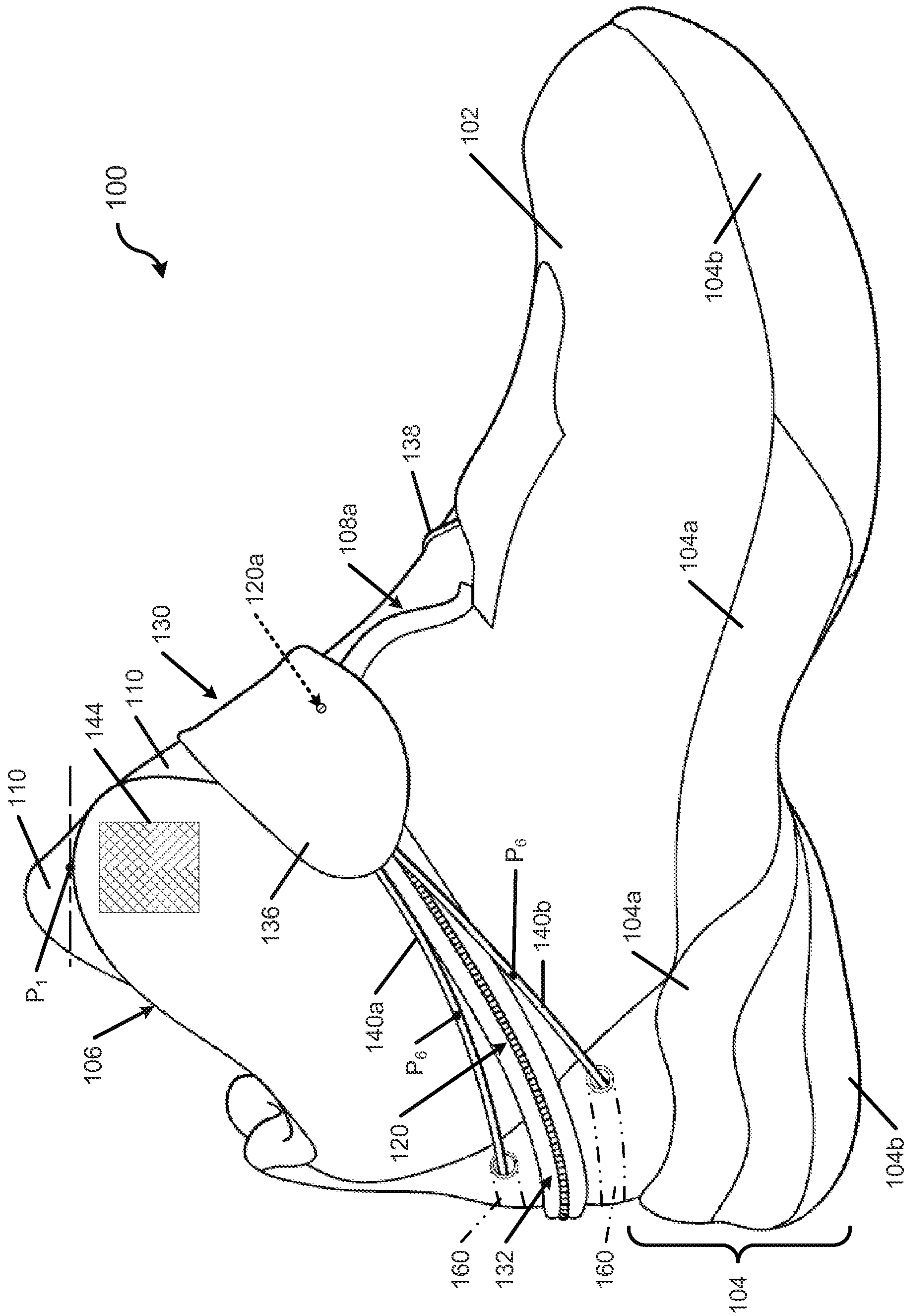


FIG. 1B

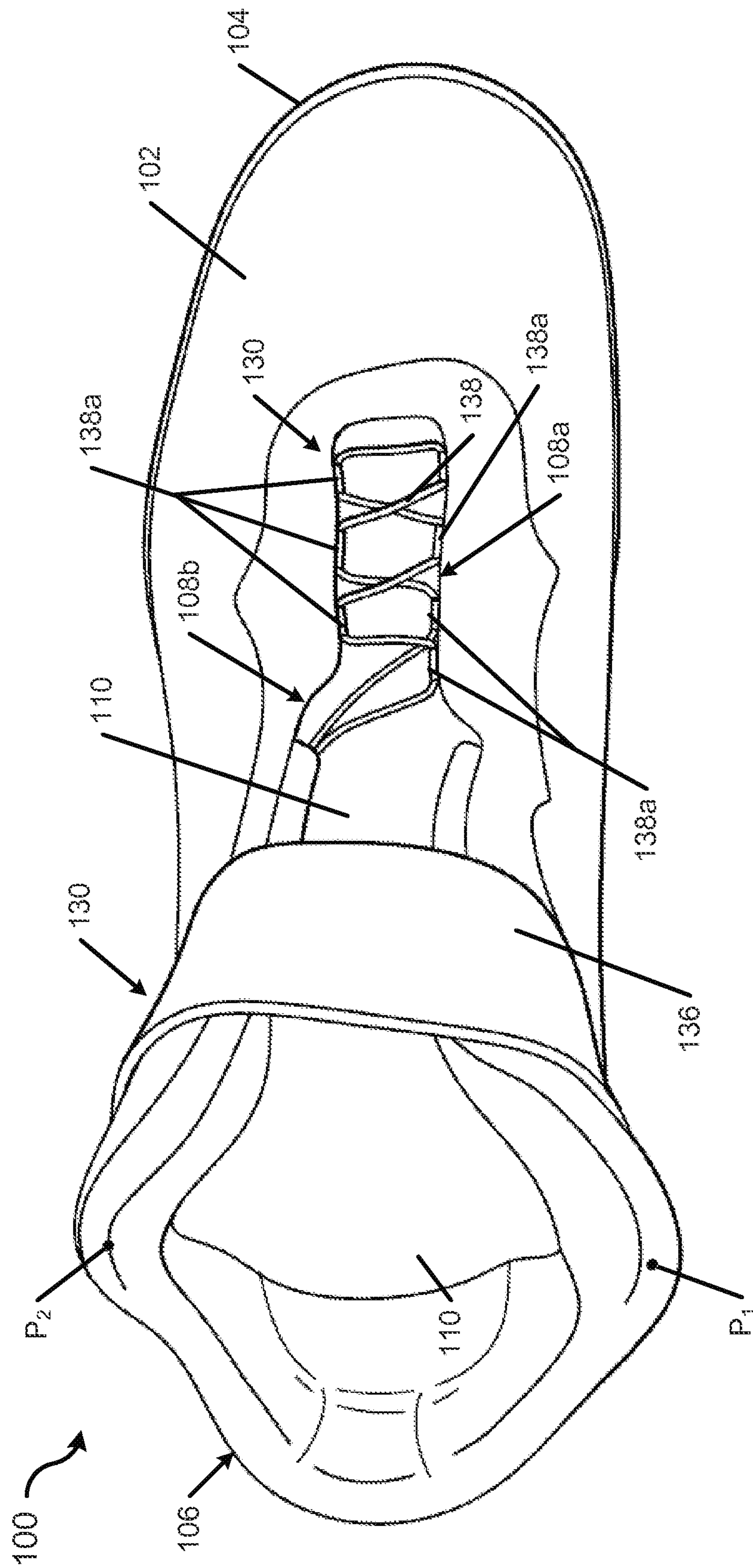


FIG. 1C

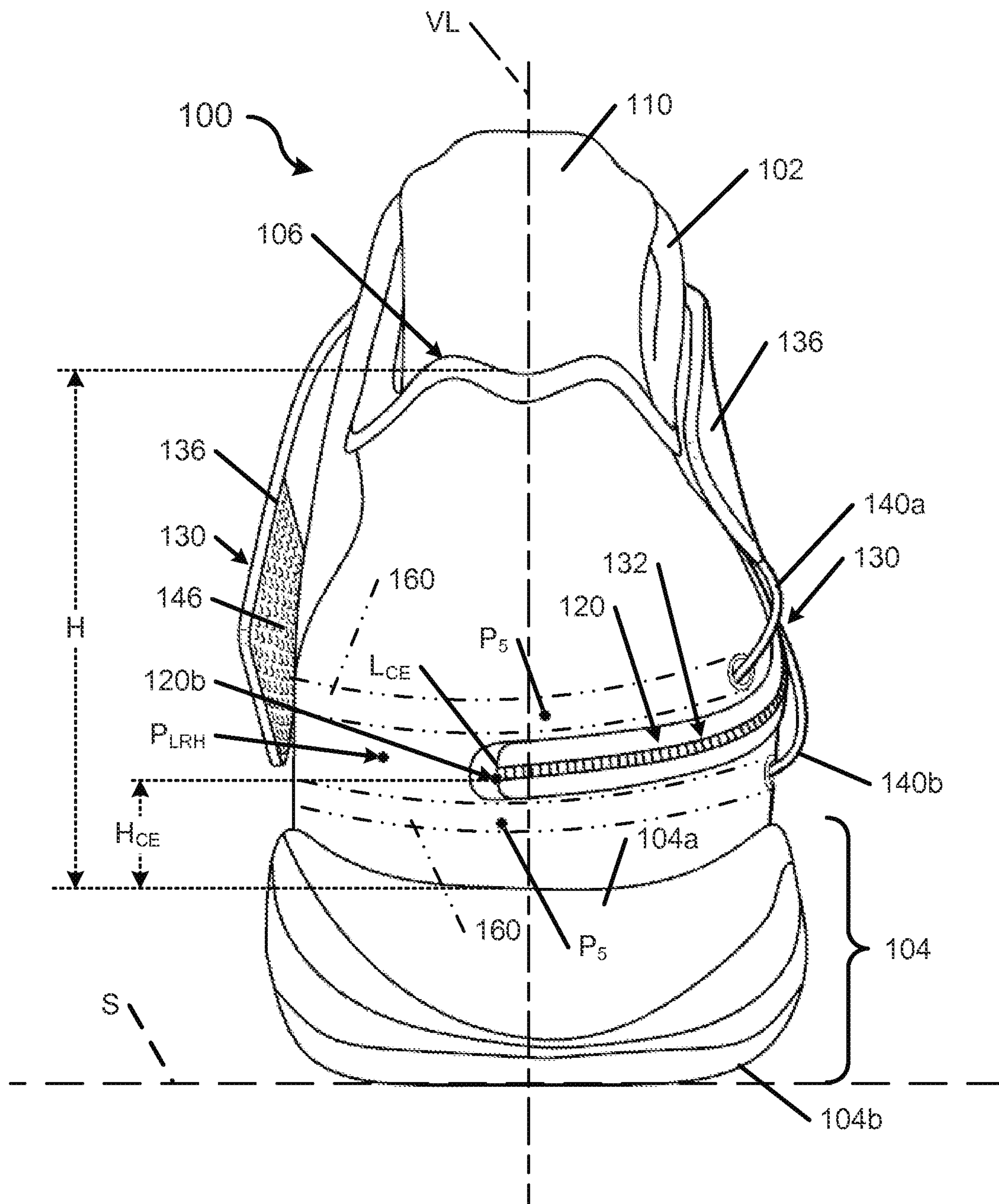
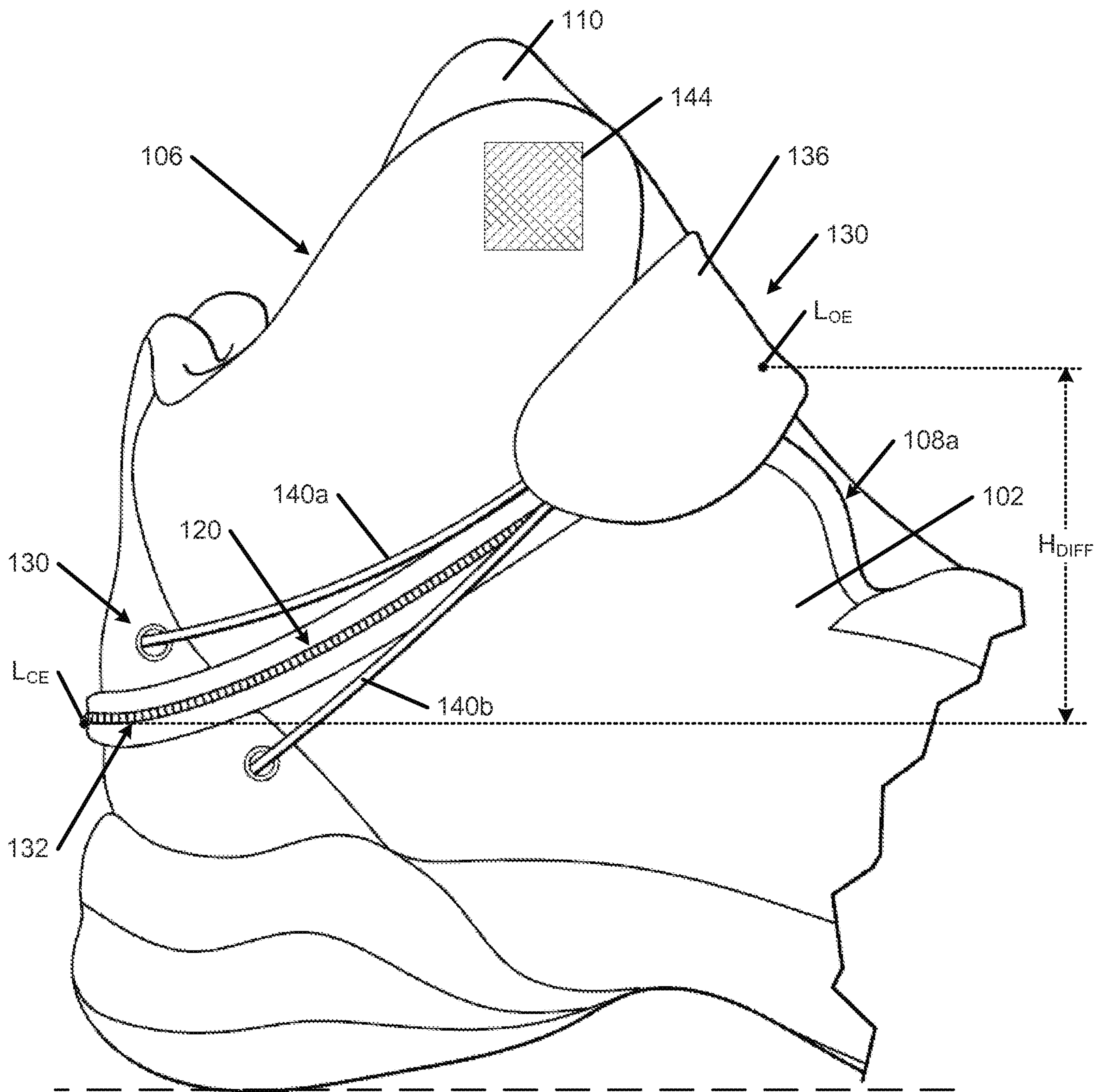


FIG. 1D

**FIG. 1E**

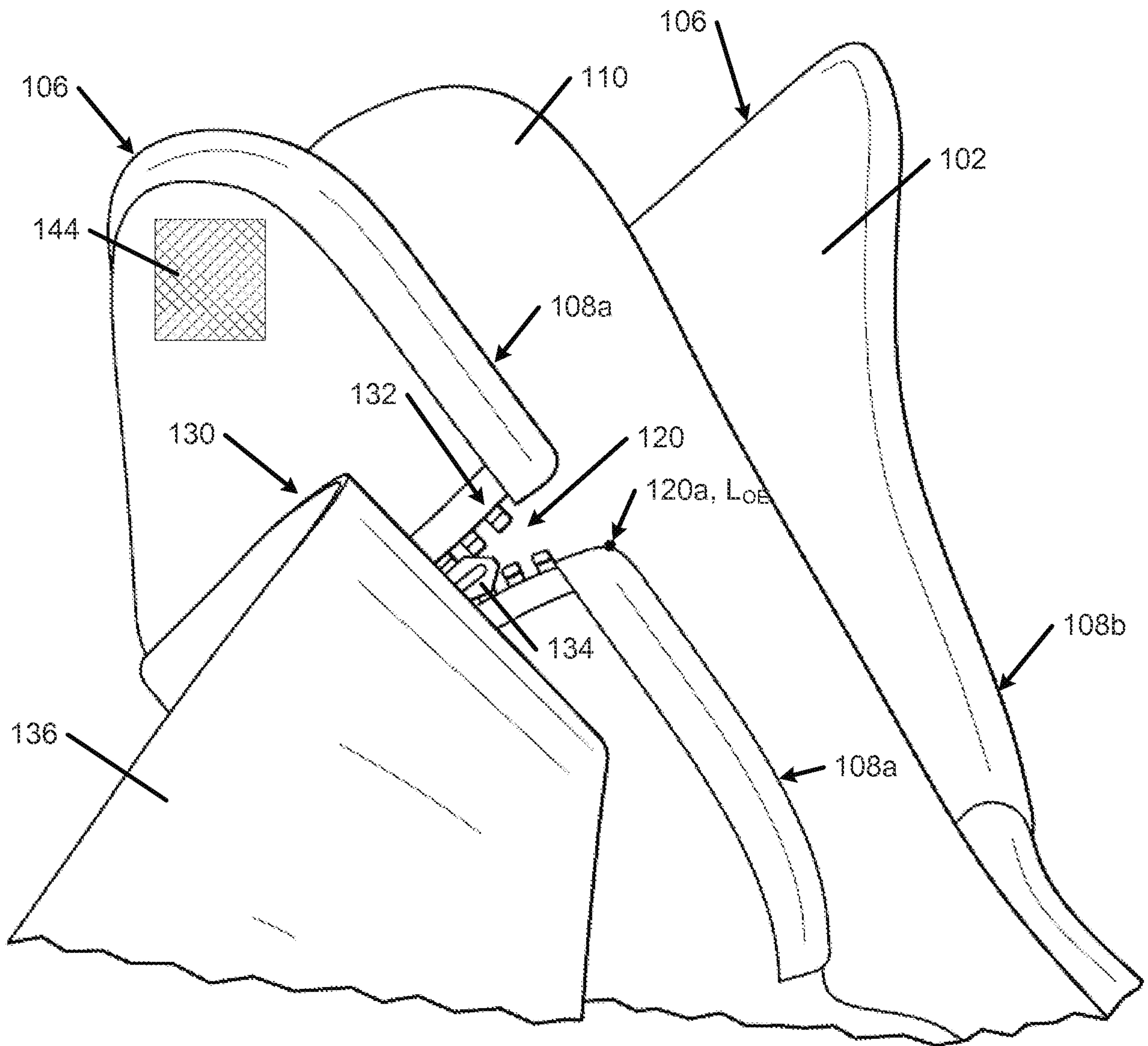


FIG. 2A

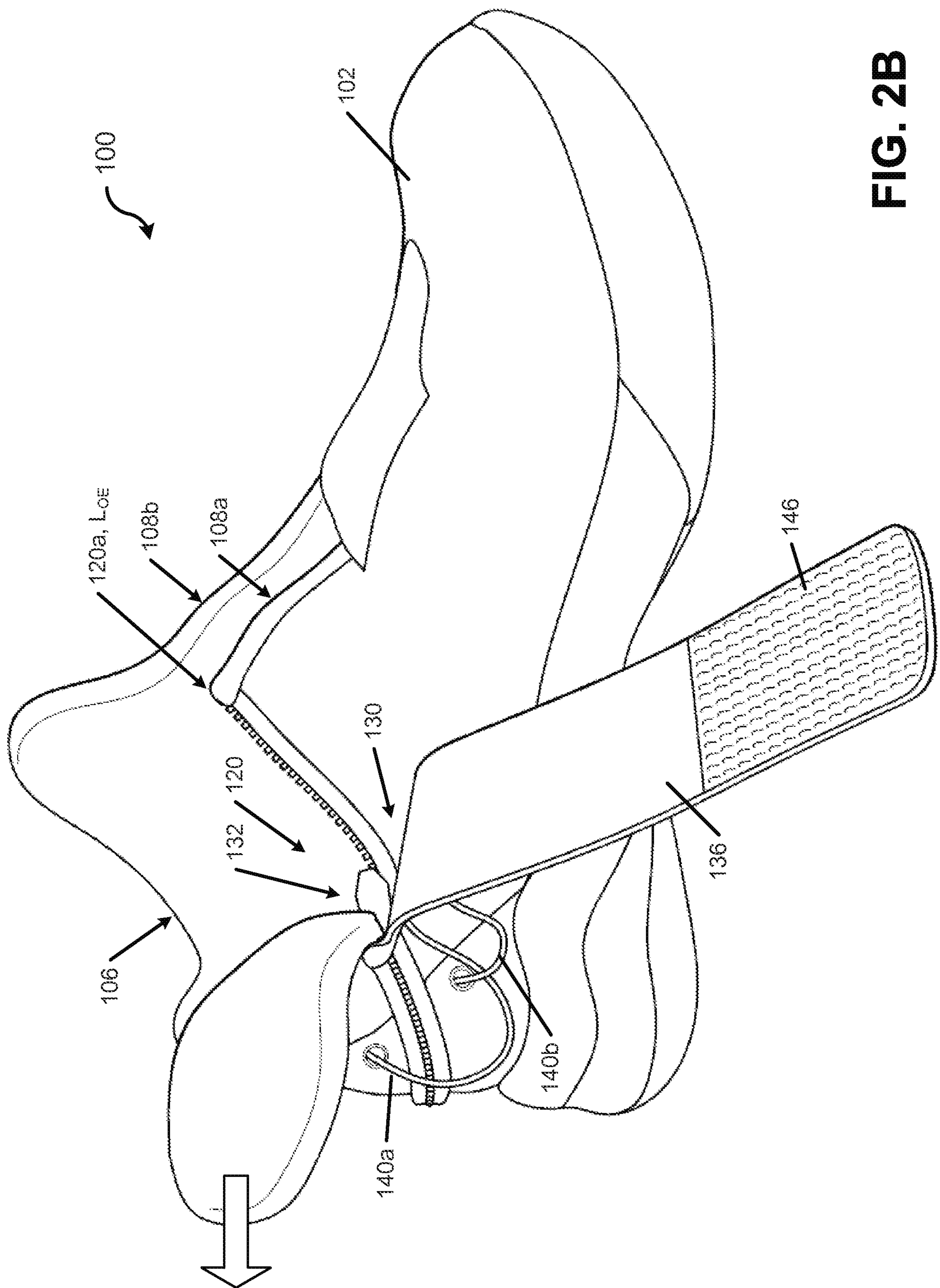


FIG. 2B

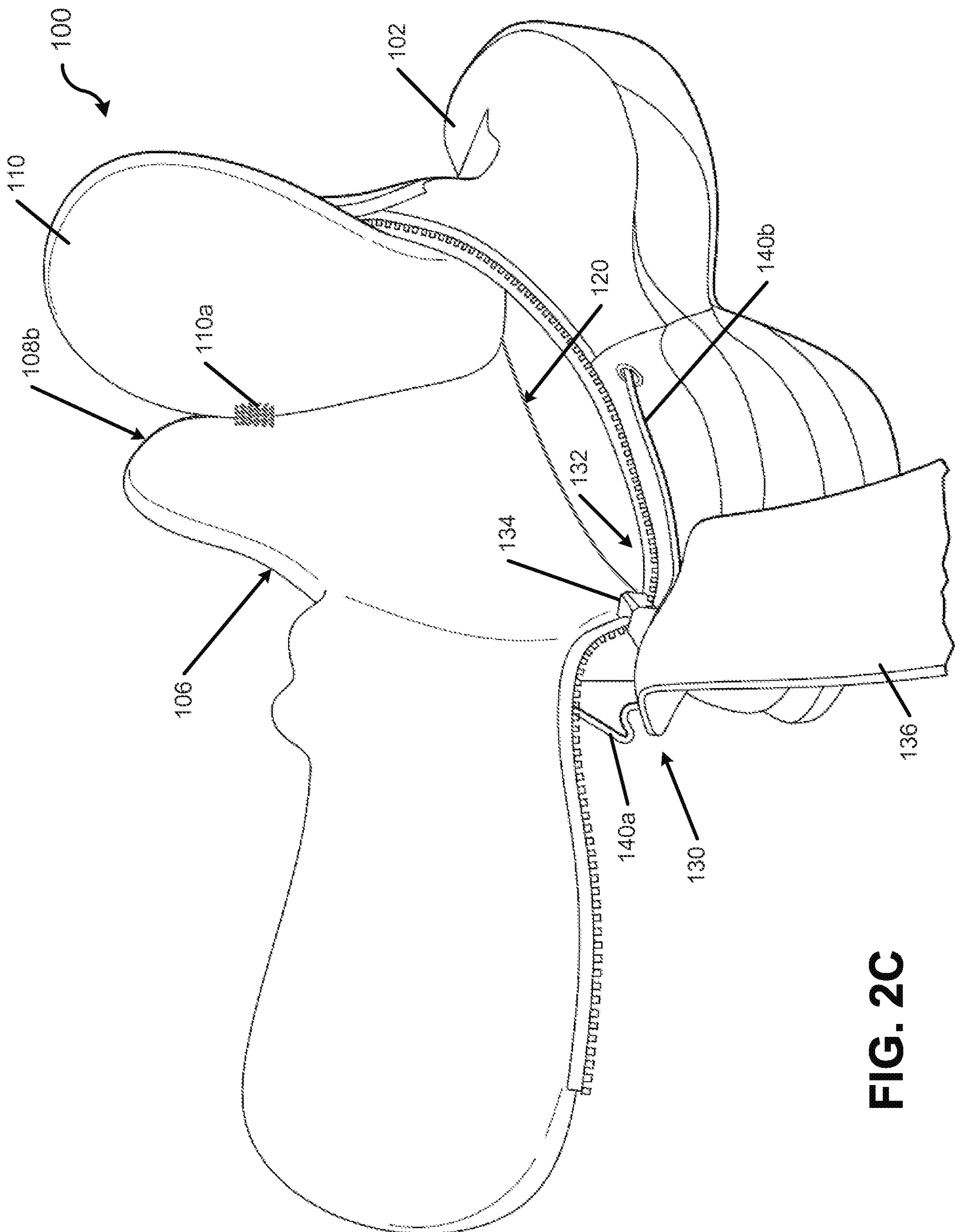
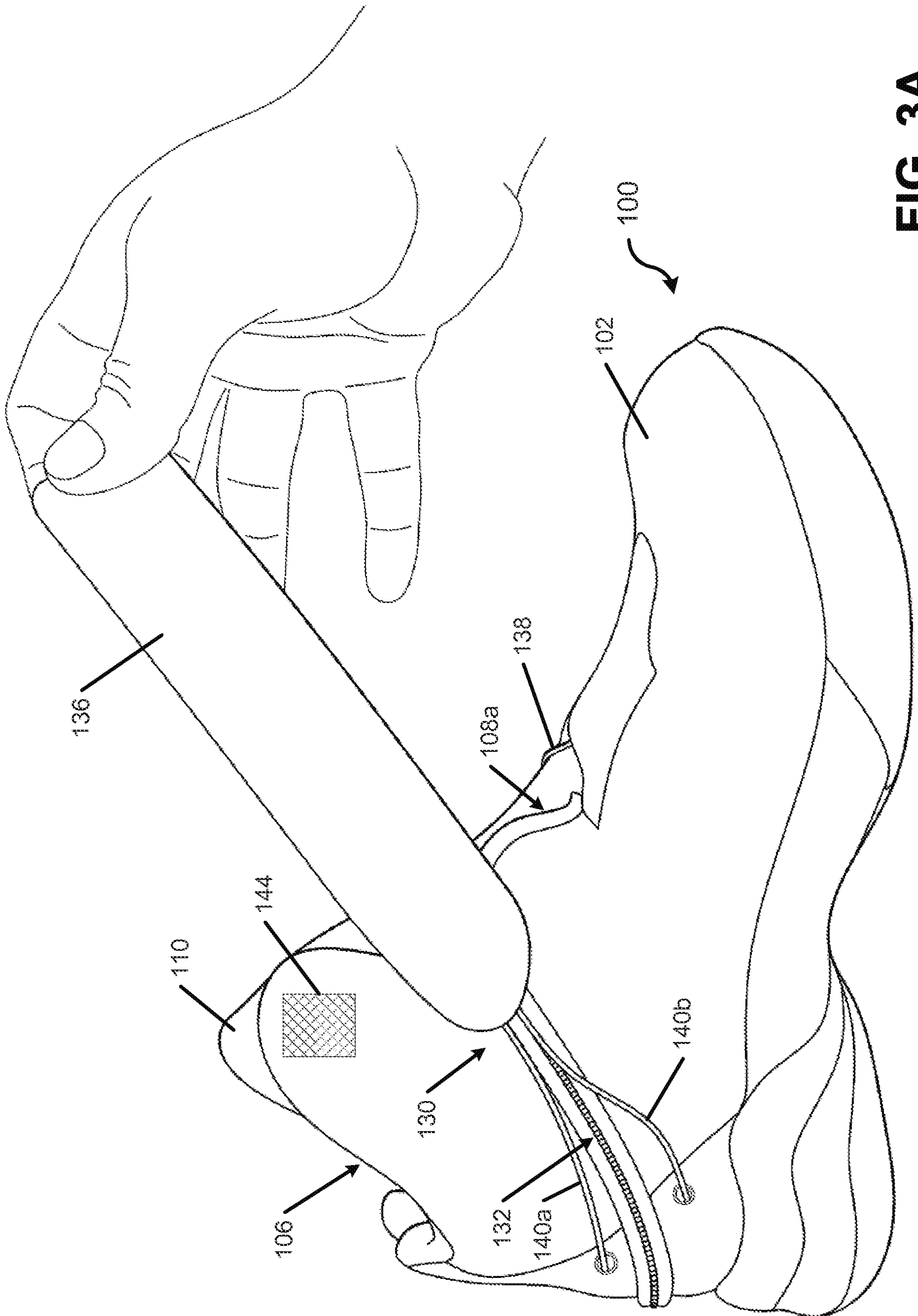
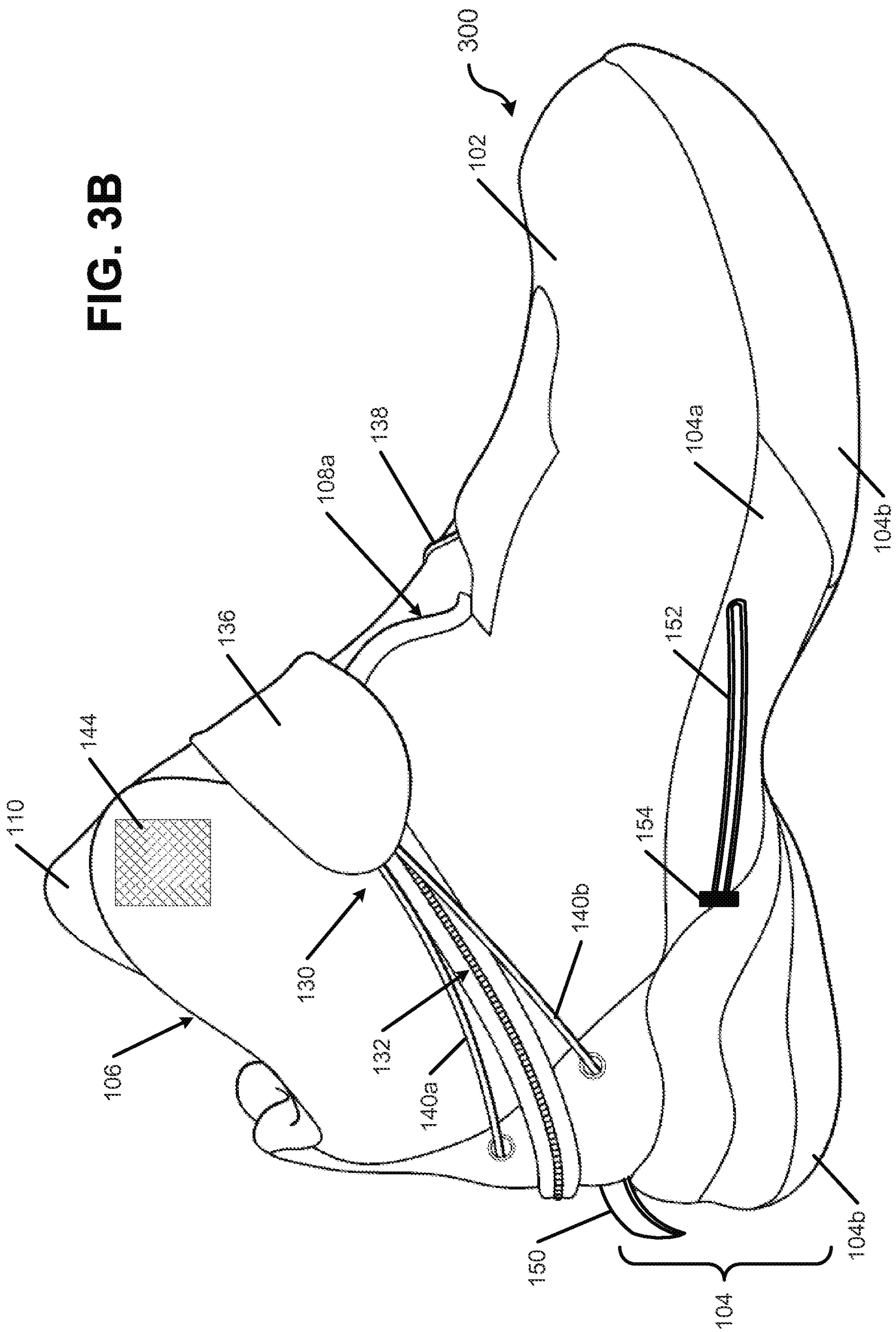
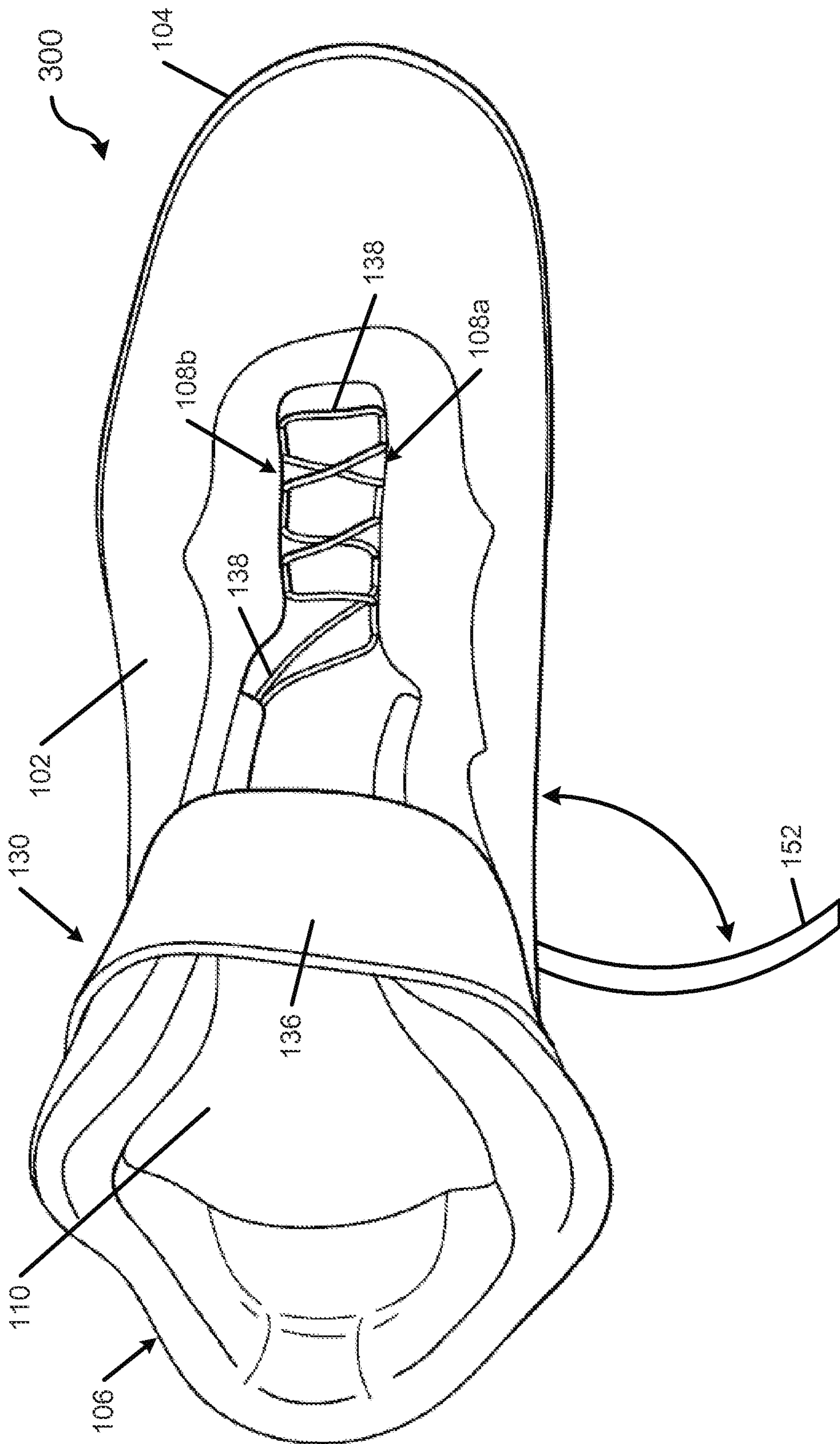


FIG. 2C

**FIG. 3A**

BE G. F.



**FIG. 3C**

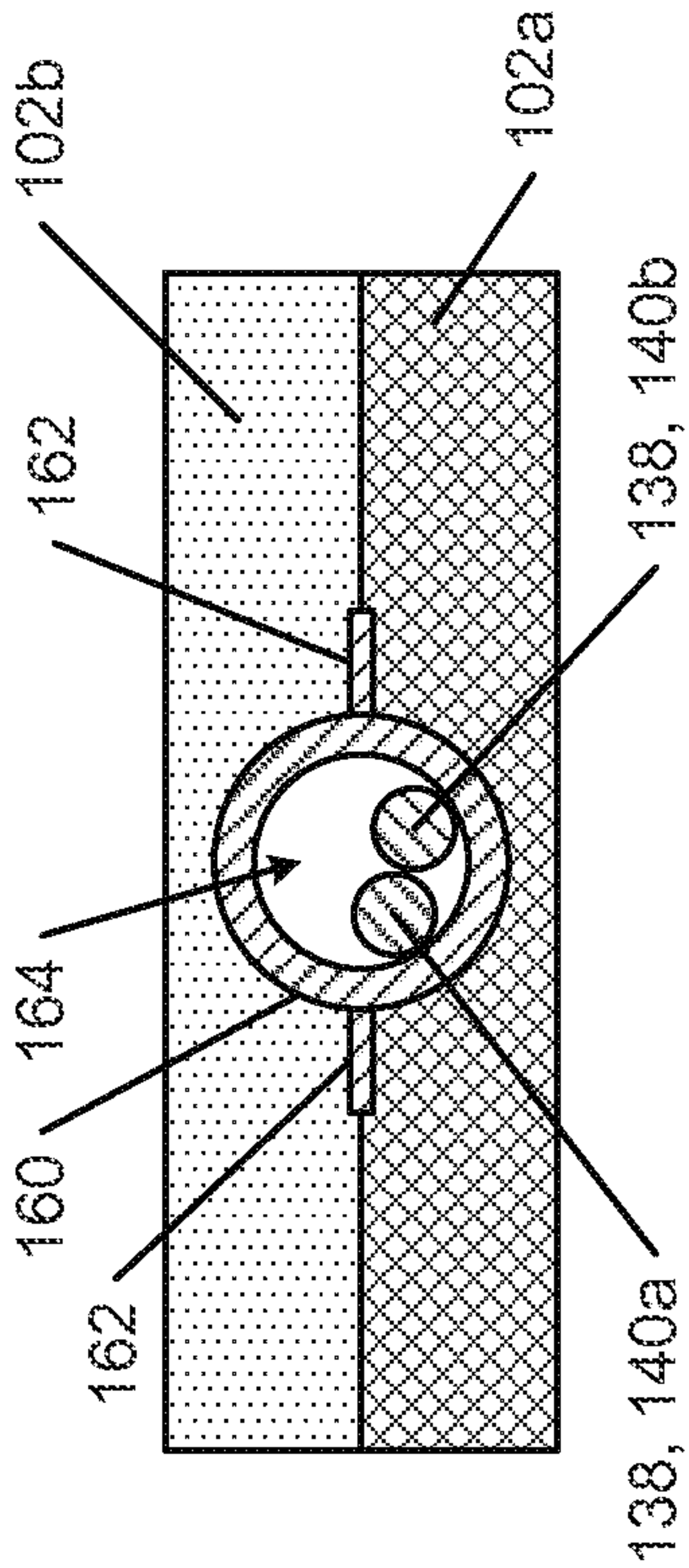


FIG. 4A

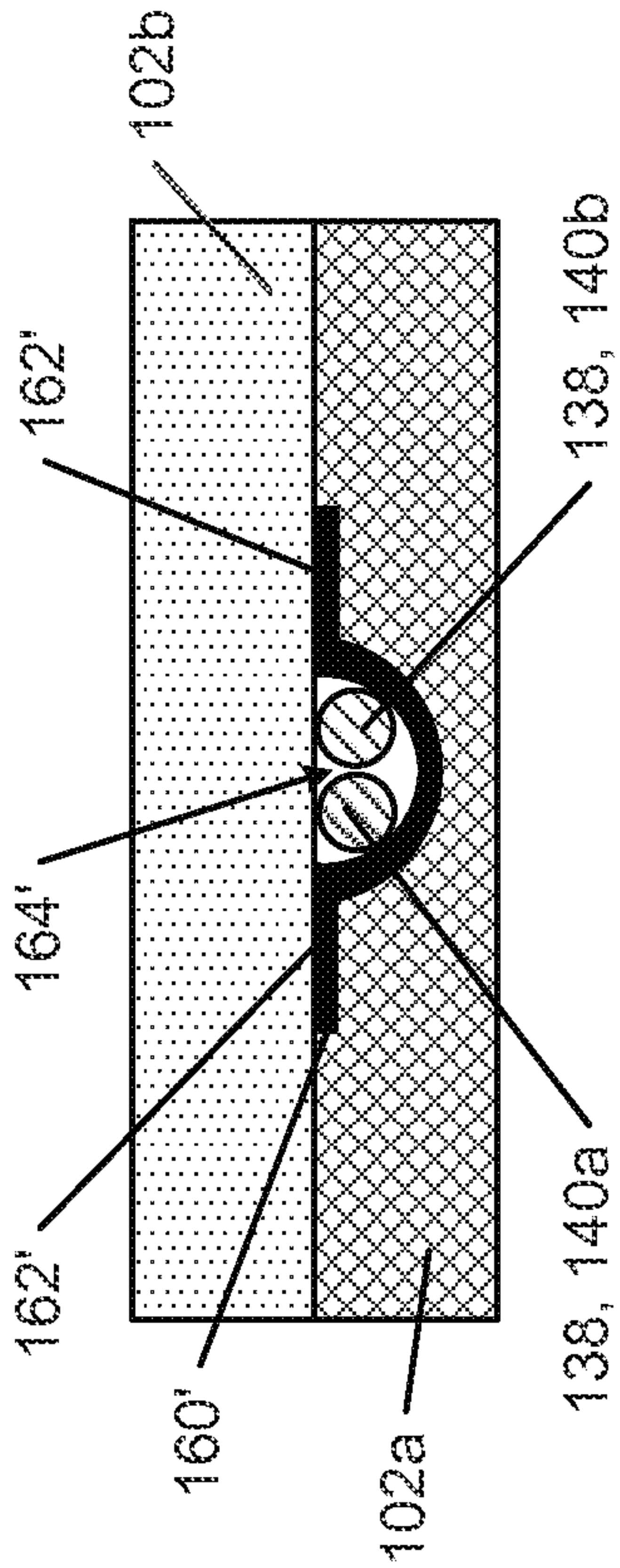


FIG. 4B

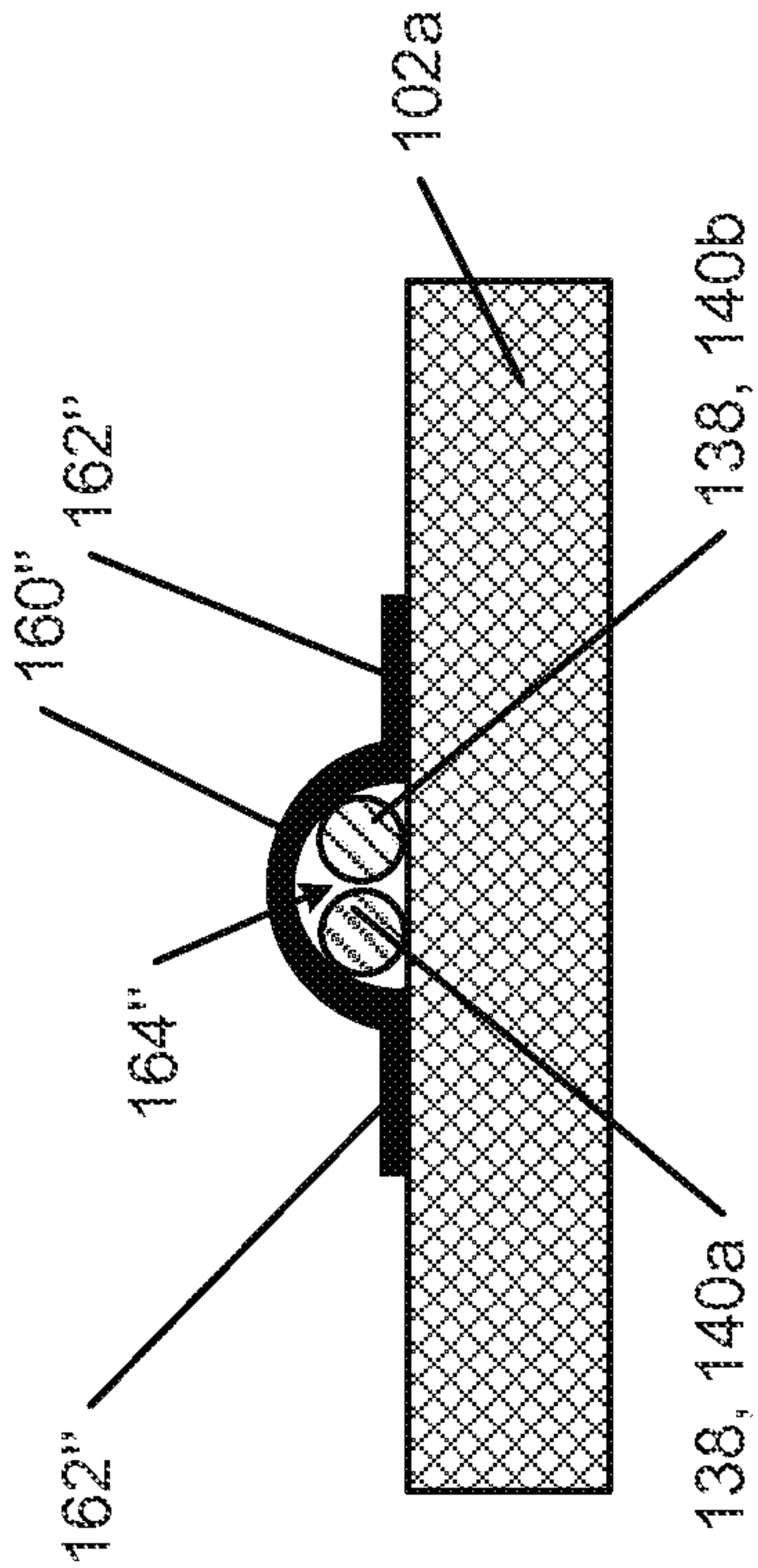


FIG. 4C

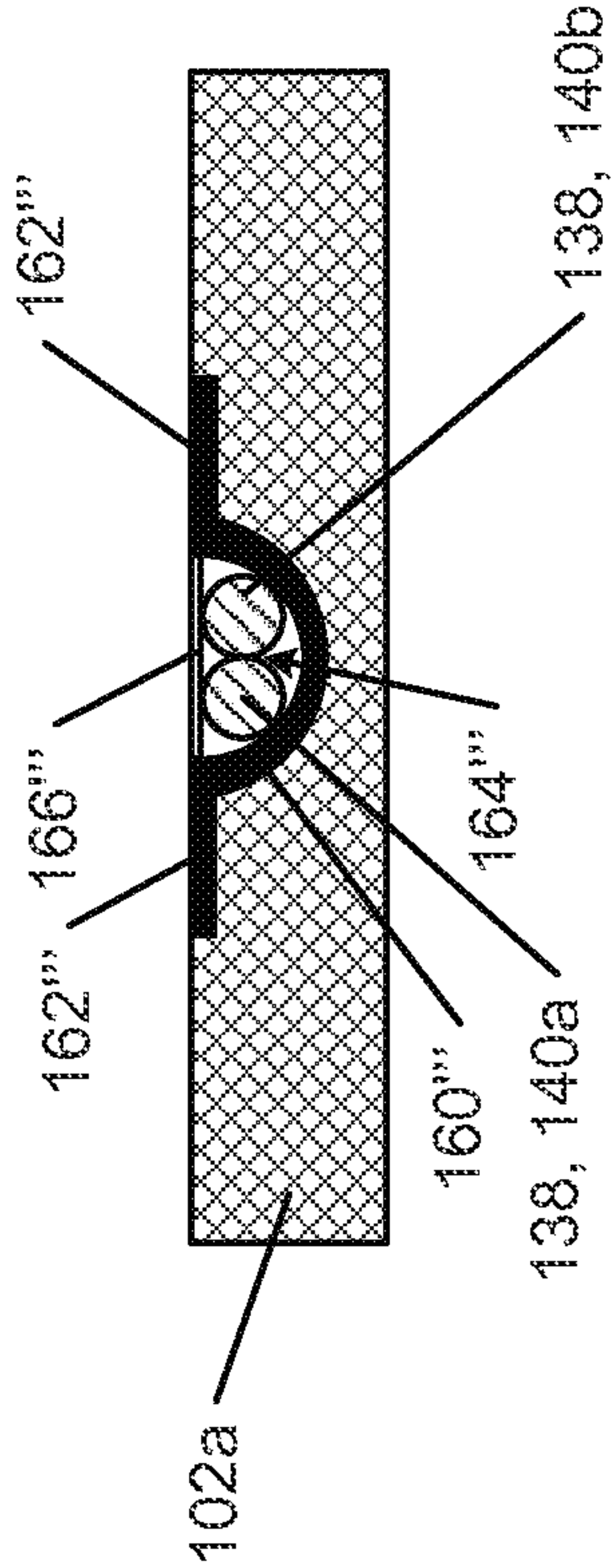


FIG. 4D

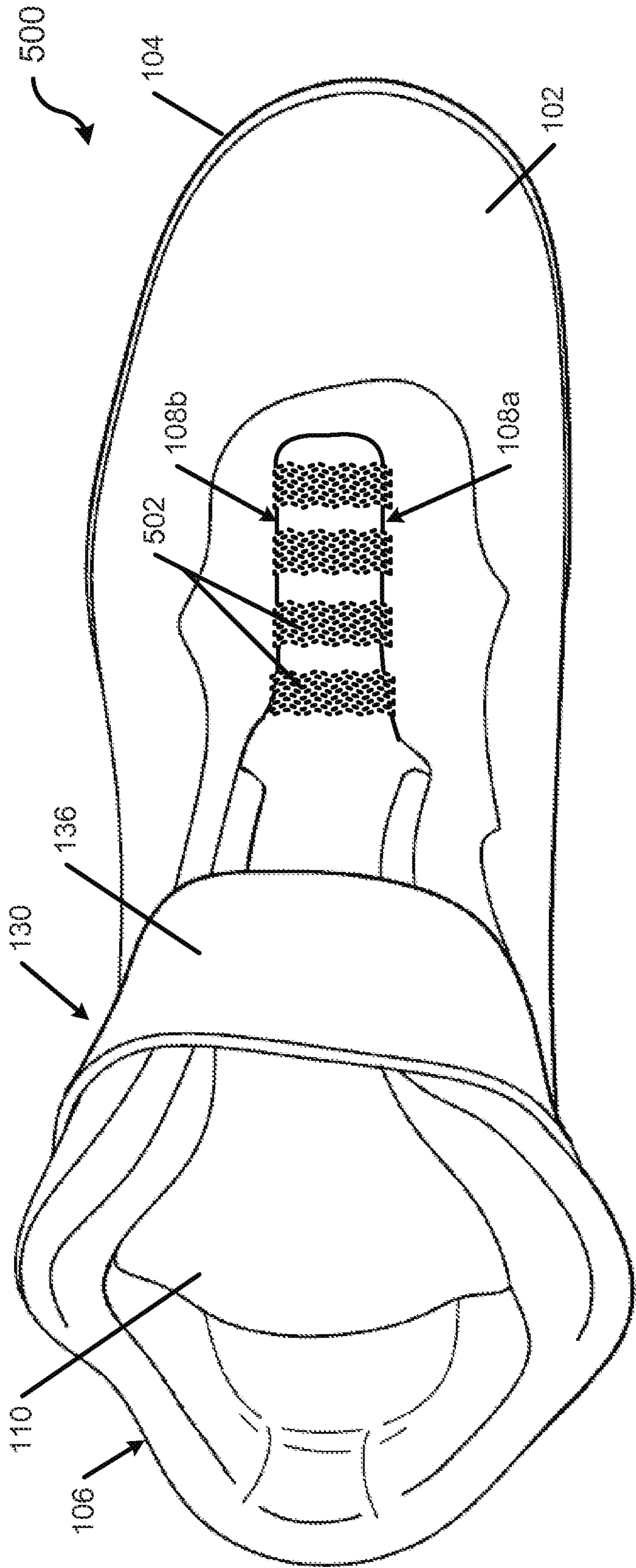


FIG. 5

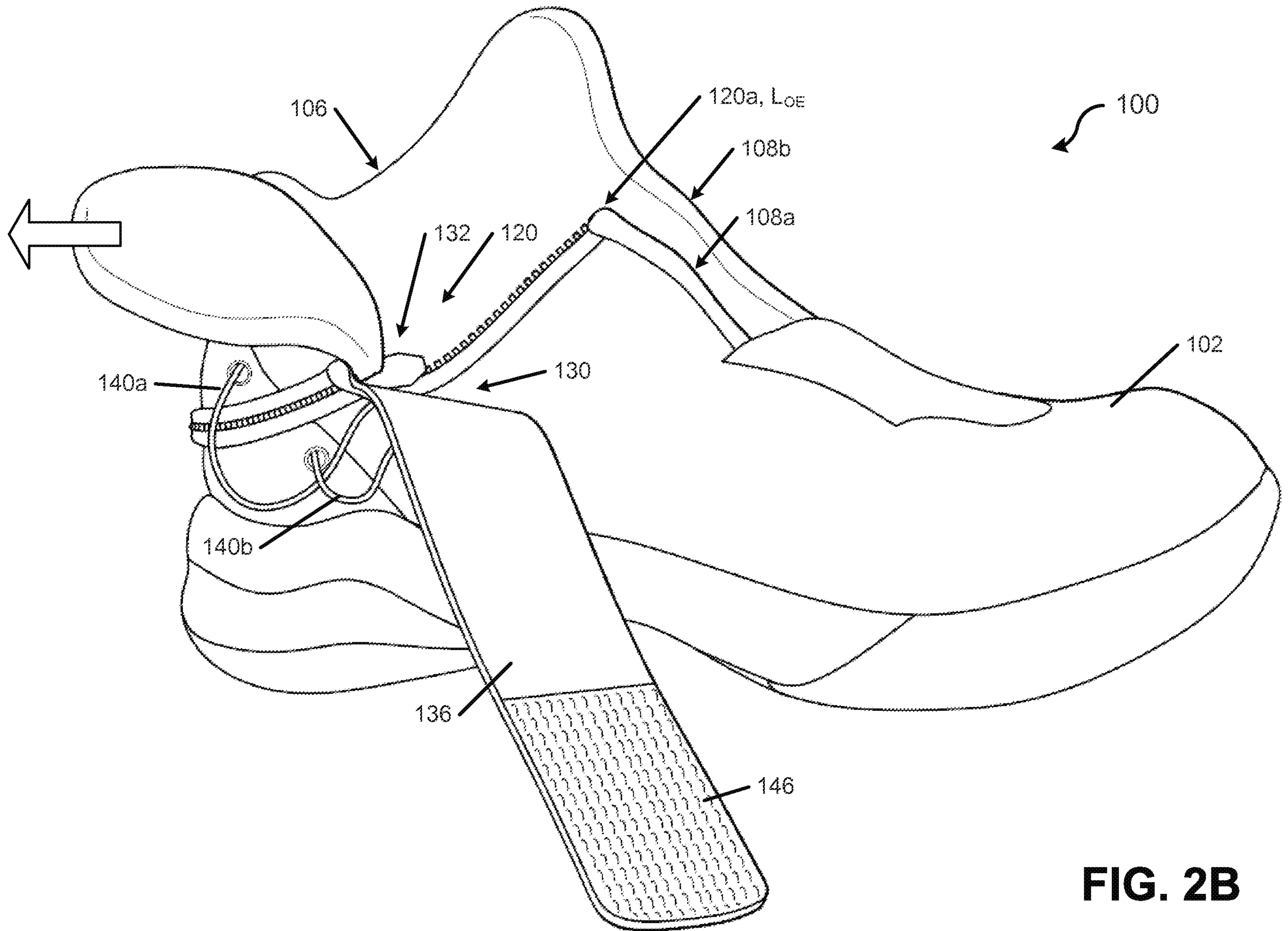


FIG. 2B