

## President's Message

by Irving M. Blank



# Speak Out to Defend Our Judiciary

HOW TIME FLIES when you are having fun! It hardly seems possible that one-fourth of my term as your president has expired.

I am enjoying serving as your president and delegate to the American Bar Association, as well as to the National Conference of Bar Presidents and the Southern Conference of Bar Presidents. There is a lot of travel and an enormous amount of time devoted to this office, but I think I speak for all of my predecessors when I say that it is well worth the effort.

In my initial report, I said that I would have no personal project except to keep your bar on the tracks and do all that I could to insure that it remains the best. Of the outstanding work of your bar staff, I can report to you that the Virginia State Bar is doing well. Executive Director Karen Gould continues to manage our daily affairs in an efficient and professional manner. She has kept our costs down (actually reduced them), while making certain that our services have not diminished. The much-talked-about dues increase that we expected five years ago has been avoided. We now have enough capital in reserves to begin to bring our technology into the twenty-first century. Our staff has still had no raises for three years and this needs to be addressed.

The backlog in the disciplinary process has been greatly reduced and the public-protection aspect of our

mission statement is being met with fewer complaints. VSB Counsel Ned Davis has done a masterful job of this major function of managing the professional regulation department.

Our committee members are amazing. We had more than 115 applicants for fifteen volunteer positions, and most of the applicants are outstanding bar leaders. It will be a challenge, but we will be finding alternative ways of using their talent — especially that of the younger lawyers who have left the ranks of the Young Lawyers Conference. If you sit through any of that conference's meetings, you realize instantly that there is a level of competence and commitment that is remarkable.

Please contact your legislators to help restore funding for judgeships. This situation is becoming more seri-

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ous every day. It is incumbent on all attorneys in Virginia to speak out in defense of the judiciary as the third branch of government. It is not just another agency. We are receiving anecdotal evidence of the impact that current vacancies are creating and of

the serious problems that future mandated retirements will cause our citizens. It is imperative that you, as members of the legal profession, speak out on this issue.

While the details have not been announced, I can assure you that we are looking at ways to increase funding for the legal aid community. Your mandatory bar and the Virginia Bar Association have been working together on ways to generate more funds for legal aid, and I hope to be able to report details in my next message. The level of cooperation and coordination between the VSB and the VBA has never been greater. Strengthening that relationship remains a very high priority for me and the officers of the VSB.

As always, I remind you that this is your bar. We can offer you administra-

tion, education, advice, and help in many other ways, but we need to hear from you. We are here to serve the thousands of lawyers in Virginia. To do that, we need to know what you need. So, let us hear from you.