

# A Second Chance for our Profession

by Michael A. Glasser 2001–2002 VSB President

Not since 1941 has the United States of America suffered an act of war on its soil at the hands of foreign agents. In many ways, the attacks of September 11, 2001, were more horrific and penetrating than the December 7, 1941, surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. Pearl Harbor was an act of war motivated by the desire to expand the territory of the Japanese Empire. The September 11 terrorist attacks appear to be acts of war motivated by a rejection of the American way of life, a clearly more expansive agenda than a claim or dispute over territory. The morning of September 11, 2001, is permanently seared into our memories. The chilling loss of life and property—as well as the inspiring acts of heroism and generosity—resulting from the attacks have reached epic proportion. We have all been touched. We are all changed.

Most of us will now confess that we have taken for granted the great freedoms and opportunities offered by America. It is as if we have been roused from a deep sleep in a most unpleasant manner. America has responded in amazing fashion. A terrible tragedy has rekindled the great American spirit. Respect for law enforcement officers, firefighters and emergency medical personnel has risen. Our flag adorns more homes, vehicles, offices and clothing than ever. Neighbors are talking. Donations of all kinds to assist the victims have been huge. In many ways, it seems the aims of the terrorists have been thwarted. The renewed American spirit is vibrant. The values and dreams of our nation's founding fathers, far from being dashed, have been elevated. Our society will need to be alert to threats and adapt to them. But our core values, as a freedom-loving, caring, democratic nation cannot be eviscerated. Our beliefs are enduring, and we remain a compassionate people.

Virginia lawyers gave generously and continue to help those whose lives and families were shattered by terrorism. This reflects well upon our profession. We should build on these contributions in a variety of ways. The horrific events have

drawn our nation closer. More people understand the important roles all professions—especially lawyers—play in a society governed by law. The proportion of the tragedies has placed our differences into better perspective. President Abraham Lincoln admonished that a house divided cannot stand. In recent years, perhaps culminating in the bizarre and historic presidential election of 2000, we witnessed just how divided our nation could become. All this now seems ages ago. We are keenly aware of the many ideals that unite us.

The opportunity, which I would call a “second chance” for the legal profession and lawyers, is no less historic. Years ago, I learned that there are two kinds of people, planters and miners. These metaphorical terms are not meant to unduly praise or impugn either calling. The point is that some people give back to the world more than they take—the remainders do the opposite. The public's perception, fostered by vitriolic diatribes in some media, has placed the legal profession in the “taker” category. While I know that label is false, the perception remains. We have the chance of a lifetime to demonstrate that we put more into the fabric of our society than we extract. There will never be a better time for lawyers to seize the moment—to pursue the second chance that the times have delivered. The amusing motion picture “City Slickers” dealt in part with the opportunity for a “do over”—a second chance. Our chance for a “do over” has arrived. There are opportunities to re-emphasize civility in our profession, to volunteer in our communities, to enhance communication and cooperation between the bar and the bench and to cooperate with our sister professions—especially the medical profession. We must be dedicated to uplifting our profession.

We must also acknowledge our great debt of gratitude to the men and women wearing the uniforms of our nation's armed forces and their families. Our thoughts and prayers are with them. ♪



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