

Remarks on the Observance of the 225th Anniversary of the Virginia Supreme Court by Virginia State Bar President David P. Bobzien

May it please the Court.

Mr. Chief Justice and Justices of the Supreme Court of Virginia, Governor Warner, Governor Baliles, Governor Wilder, Lieutenant Governor Kaine, Attorney General Kilgore, Senator Stolle, Delegate Griffith, members of the Virginia Court of Appeals and other members of the Virginia Judiciary, and Honored Guests:

As the President of the Virginia State Bar, which is an administrative agency of the Supreme Court, it is a great pleasure for me to participate in this anniversary observance.

On August 12, 2003, in San Francisco, Richmond's own Robert Grey became the president-elect of the American Bar Association. In remarks he gave that day, he talked about a house that was

constructed in America over two centuries ago—the “House of Justice.” Like any house, the House of Justice has a foundation. That foundation includes the cornerstones of due process; the presumption of innocence; trial by jury; and an independent judiciary. The foundation is solid, but it needs constant strengthening, repair, and care so that it will not be eroded. The House of Justice also has a door—a door through which those who seek justice must pass, a door that for too long was closed to too many. When a former reporter of decisions of the Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals—a former reporter by the name of Thomas Jefferson—wrote that all men are created equal, the door was opened. When Susan B. Anthony made it clear that women were created as equals of men, the door opened wider. When Thurgood Marshall won *Brown v. Board of Education* fifty years ago, everyone could then use the front door. When Oliver Hill challenged massive



resistance and reopened the public schools in Virginia, the door swung wider still.

One of the core missions of the Virginia State Bar, along with regulating the practice of law and improving the legal profession and the judicial system, is to advance the availability and quality of legal services provided to the people of Virginia—in short to see that the door to the House of Justice will always be opened wide for the weak, for those who have no voice, and for those whom we dislike and even despise.

Robert Grey's House of Justice is allegorical, but today we celebrate the birthday of a real house of justice, one which has endured and flourished for 225 years. While today we celebrate the anniversary of the Supreme Court as an institution, we also celebrate the entire Virginia judicial system, which the Supreme Court oversees. The Supreme Court, the entire judiciary, and the

Virginia State Bar are dedicated to shouldering our shared responsibility to the people of the Commonwealth of Virginia. That responsibility is to keep the door to the House of Justice opened to its very hinges.

Robert Grey concluded his remarks in San Francisco on that beautiful summer day with the following:

“I was brought up to believe that some day we will all stand in a house not built with hands. And in that house we will be judged with both justice and mercy. Until that day, let us use our hands and minds and hearts to ensure that our current dwelling reflects both the justice and mercy of that house.”

I thank you very much.

Left: David P. Bobzien, president of the Virginia State Bar, addressed the Supreme Court of Virginia as it marked its 225th anniversary December 9 with a forty-five minute ceremony. Dignitaries attending included Governor Mark R. Warner; Lieutenant Governor Timothy M. Kaine; Attorney General Jerry W. Kilgore; Senator Kenneth W. Stolle, R-Virginia Beach and chair of the Senate Courts of Justice Committee; House Majority Leader H. Morgan Griffith, R-Salem; former Governor Gerald L. Baliles; and now-Richmond Mayor L. Douglas Wilder. The Supreme Court of Virginia predates the United State Supreme Court—and the U.S. Constitution—by nine years.

Below: The seven justices of the current Supreme Court of Virginia (l–r): Donald W. Lemons, Lawrence L. Koontz Jr.; Elizabeth B. Lacy; Chief Justice Leroy R. Hassell Sr.; Cynthia D. Kinser; Barbara Milano Keenan; and G. Steven Agee.

