

President's Message

by Irving M. Blank



Contribute to Your Bar

AS I BEGIN TO SERVE as your seventy-second president, let me assure you that I am humbled and honored to be leading the Virginia State Bar. I have been practicing law in this commonwealth for more than forty-three years, and I believe that I understand lawyers' needs and the pressure that every lawyer feels. I assure you that I will devote my best efforts to making your life as a lawyer better, while at the same time placing public protection at the top of my priorities.

When I was installed last month at the annual meeting in Virginia Beach, I set out a modest agenda as president. My acceptance speech promised that I would do my best to keep this organization running as smoothly as it has in the past. Indeed, when attending national and regional bar meetings, it does not take long to realize that we have one of the, if not *the*, best mandatory bars in this country.

I do not intend to take on a project, as some presidents have. I do, however, hope to continue Immediate Past President Jon D. Huddleston's wonderful Virginia Is for Good Lawyers program. Past President Manny A. Capsalis's Diversity Initiative is now a Court-approved conference of the bar and it will take on an identity of its own.

This office has a history of attracting issues that are unexpected, but require immediate attention.

One issue is the budget recently passed by our General Assembly, which, when signed into law by the governor, created a restriction on the appointment of non-appellate judges until 2012. While the VSB is limited in its ability to lobby, it is not limited in calling on its members to express our concerns about this action.

In February 2010, your bar council voted 53–2, with 1 abstention, to object to the decision to not appoint judges to fill the nineteen current vacancies and the more than fifty that will exist by 2012. I ask each of you to let your legislator and the governor know that this failure to adequately staff our courts directly affects our mission to advance the availability and quality of legal services provided to the people of Virginia, as well as to assist in improving the legal profession and the judicial system. We will face a judicial system that will be hard-pressed to deliver the required services that our citizenry will rightfully demand. This will be felt throughout our society. We will have to deal with the lack of judges to issue protective orders in domestic violence cases, and injunctions in business disputes. The crisis will include the inability to resolve civil disputes — both tort and contract — in a timely manner, as well as to get the guidance of the courts in estate matters and the prompt adjudication of criminal and regulatory violations.

In a state that ranks near the top of America's fifty states in income, employment, education, transportation, and almost every meaningful category, we have severely limited the delivery of legal services by our judicial branch of government by not appointing needed judges. This needs to be addressed by every member of the bar and I hope that you will do so at every opportunity.

Another issue that seems to get worse every year is the funding for legal aid. Part of our mission statement is to advance access to legal services. In the economic environment in which we find ourselves, this problem needs to be addressed in a creative and sustained fashion, and I hope to be able to communicate with you in the near future about ways to do just that.

I pledge to you that I will be ever mindful of the mission of the VSB and that I will try to listen to as many of you as want to communicate with your bar office. At this time next year, I hope that I can say that Virginia's legal profession is in the same enviable position as it was when the bar year started. Just remember that this is your bar and you need to participate to make your professional life better, so please do not sit on the sidelines. Get involved, be heard, and contribute to your profession.