

Passing the Gavel and Other Passages



Ronald D. Keefe

This year as State Bar president has passed quickly for me. Traveling around the state at a whirlwind pace has something to do with it, but so does the number of initiatives our Bar has undertaken this year. Work has a way of speeding up the passage of time. Through it all, I have been constantly reminded that it is the talented people who make up this State Bar who make it special. Before passing the gavel, I'd like to retrace some of the highs and lows of this year and express my gratitude to the people who made it possible.

We began the year marking a different kind of passage: the death of my good friend and immediate past president, Kim Cahill. At our Annual Meeting in Grand Rapids in September, I had the privilege of sharing the stage with Kim at the awards dinner to honor those who give back to the profession. Kim and I shared many special moments during our years of Bar service, but this night was exceptional. What a time we had giving out the Liberty Bell, Cumiskey Pro Bono, Champion of Justice, and Frank J. Kelley Distinguished Public Service awards to extraordinary individuals who contribute so much to our system of justice. We were together again the next day for the passing of the gavel at the inaugural luncheon. Events preceding the swearing-in ceremony lasted longer than planned, and there was not enough time remaining for both of us to give our prepared remarks. Kim cut short her remarks so I would have time for mine. This was vintage Kim Cahill: exceptionally kind and always selfless.

After the Annual Meeting, I headed to Canada at the invitation of the Ontario Bar Association, and a couple of weeks later traveled through the Upper Peninsula for the president's traditional U.P. tour. As only the third president from the Upper Peninsula in

the history of the State Bar of Michigan—and the first in nearly 50 years—I had an incredible time celebrating with old friends and colleagues. My year was off to a great start. Then the news came that Kim was ill.

The euphoria of those first weeks as president turned to concern for Kim as we learned more about her illness, to prayer as she struggled with pain and discomfort, and finally to incomprehensible sadness in January over the loss of this wonderful human being.

We mourned, and we moved on doing the Bar's business as Kim would expect. An initiative to explore ways to promote and support an active senior bar in Michigan began to take shape. I am excited about the opportunities for senior lawyers to do pro bono and other volunteer work, start mentoring relationships with new lawyers, and establish programming related to retirement and cutting back or closing down law practices.

The Bar's commitment to the rule of law was tested when Pakistani President Musharraf suspended the national constitution, detained members of the Supreme Court, and arrested thousands of Pakistani lawyers who were peacefully protesting the dismantling of their legal system. On November 14, 2007, numerous Michigan law-

yers and others across the United States stood in silence near local courthouses to show solidarity and support for our counterparts in Pakistan. As guardians of the rule of law in this country, we lawyers can breathe life again into our role by supporting an independent judiciary, protecting the attorney-client privilege, and maintaining our professional independence.

On June 17, the State Bar of Michigan released an important study from the National Legal Aid and Defender Association (NLADA) that overwhelmingly concluded the constitutional right to an attorney in criminal proceeding in Michigan is not being met in our trial-level courts. Even in tough economic times, we cannot deny our citizens their constitutional rights. We must respond to the NLADA report in a meaningful way that ensures equal justice for all, not just some.

I close my last column with a sincere thanks to all who helped make this year such an unforgettable experience. Space does not permit mentioning everyone by name, but I do want to thank my friends and colleagues on the Board of Commissioners and at the State Bar. It was a privilege to stand with you in working to improve our profession for our members and the public.

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I also want to acknowledge certain members of the State Bar team who have had such an impact on my ability to do my job on a daily basis:

- Marge Bossenbery, executive coordinator, who was simply indispensable. I don't think I did anything or went anywhere for the Bar that she didn't have a hand in.
- Kari Brandel, manager of membership services and events, for her outstanding work planning such successful events as the Annual Meeting, Bar Leadership Forum, and Upper Michigan Legal Institute.
- Candace Crowley, director of external development, who scheduled my meetings with local bar associations and other groups and organizations—and so much more.
- Elizabeth Lyon, director of governmental relations, for her work in promoting the interests of our profession to the legislature.
- Linda Novak, editor of this publication, for her helpful comments and suggestions—and friendly deadline reminders—for these columns.
- Anne Smith, administrative assistant, for coordinating my schedule and keeping me on track.
- Naseem Stecker, manager of media and public relations, for keeping me current on topics of interest to the media and the public.
- Anne Vrooman, director of research and development, for her efforts in developing the Bar's senior lawyer initiative.
- Janet Welch, our steady and always competent executive director, who was such a pleasure to work with.

Last but not least, I want to thank Lorie McAuliffe, my legal assistant, who had the daunting task of coordinating my law practice and Bar schedules; Laura Katers Reilly, my law partner, without whom these columns would be incomprehensible; and my wonderful wife of 40 years, Marilyn, for her tremendous support and encouragement throughout this year. Whatever I have accomplished in life, I owe much of it to her. ■