

Let's Talk



John T. Berry

In recent months several articles by President Ryan and myself have spoken of the State Bar's readiness to evaluate all we do. Each Bar program is being studied to determine whether it helps support a core function of our mission or whether it might just be a reflection of misdirected good intentions. Dramatic change is afoot.

What you have told us, in letters, phone calls, focus groups, and face-to-face, is that the status quo is not acceptable. We at the Bar have also come to realize that we simply cannot continue to pay for our existing programs as they now are constituted, let alone add new programs you would rather see. That means making hard choices involving both finances and programs.

My last article outlined the methodology and guiding principles we are using to determine which programs to let go, which programs to modify, and which programs to add to or enlarge.

By the time this article is printed, much more work will have already been done to ascertain your desires for our Bar and profession. If as you read this you say to yourself, "Well, no one asked *me* my opinion. No one

put me in a focus group," then you should know that every attempt is being made to give you another way to express your opinion. More importantly, every attempt is being made to give you a reason to want to add your viewpoint.

What follows is a summary of actions under way and a list of opportunities for you to contribute in this effort. On July 20th a comprehensive report was submitted to the Board of Commissioners by Dadie Perlov of the Consensus Management Group. That report summarized the results from the most extensive study of our membership ever conducted. The bulk of the data came from person-to-person dialogue with all segments of the profession through focus groups.

A diverse planning and advisory group will be meeting on August 15th and 16th to review those findings and submit their recommendations to the Board of Commissioners. The Board of Commissioners will be meeting once each month in July, August, and September to review the "State of the Bar"—good and not so good.

Conclusions must be made about what we can and cannot afford to do. Equally important is to prioritize programs in such a way as to allow us to move ahead with the greatest dispatch on the most important items.

Such soul-searching involves realistic financial expenditures determined and implemented in the prudent way expected of all in a fiduciary responsibility. We have not done our best in the recent past, but recognizing that and facing up to it will allow you to observe that we are doing our very best now.

In that regard, President-elect Bruce Neckers has added two well-respected CPA-lawyers to the SBM's finance committees in order to add a fresh outside look to our future financial health. Their addition to our already excellent committee will provide the proper financial planning for meeting the goals we set together.

I reiterate, we are not in the midst of tinkering around the edges of issues. We are hitting all issues straight on. To do that requires doing things such as extending the review

period for the budget to allow a more deliberate decision-making process before spending your money. For that reason this year's budget will not be finally approved until September or October.

I've been privileged to be recruited to this state to be a part of this far-reaching process. I will spend most of July and August traveling the state answering as many questions as I can, providing as much information as possible, and listening a lot. If you want me at your committee, section, law firm (small or large), or if you just want to talk over lunch, I will make myself available.

Finally at the Annual Meeting we will be having a "Let's Talk—Breakfast with John Berry" session. By then many of you who have not responded in any other way can still drop by and let me know what you think. Fill the room. We need to talk.

Listed below are the ongoing programs of our Bar. Let us know by e-mail (voice@mail.michbar.org) or by visiting our website at www.michbar.org which programs you see as fundamental to our mission and which are best left to others or for another day.

This is an exciting time. Thanks for the chance to be a part of it. ♦

Programs

Access to Justice	Local & Affinity Bar
Annual Meeting	Media Relations
Bar Journal	Membership Services & Endorsed
Character & Fitness	Vendors/Sales
Client Protection Fund	Michigan Lawyers Auxiliary
Community Relations Development	New Presidents Retreat
E-filing Project	Open Justice & Open Justice Commission
e-Journal	Opening Doors Conference
Governmental Relations	Print on Demand
Internet Communications	Regulation Counsel
Judicial Conference	Upper Michigan Legal Institute
Law Day	Young Lawyers Section
Law School for Legislators	
Lawyer Referral Service	
Lawyers & Judges Assistance	