

John T. Berry



The Rule of Law—Never to Be Taken for Granted

On May 3, 2004, I had the privilege of being in attendance and having the opportunity to make a few remarks at the State of Michigan Law Day Ceremony conducted at the Hall of Justice.

The guest speaker was Michigan Supreme Court Justice Stephen Markman.

Let me congratulate Mary Ann Farris, Chair, Fran Anderson and Audrey Gray, and all members of the Michigan Lawyers Auxiliary for their great contribution to our state's understanding of the importance of the rule of law.

Despite cutbacks in funding and difficult economic challenges, they have continued to set an example in outreach to our citizens in this important topic.

The celebration brings together leaders of all branches of our government to honor 6th, 7th, and 8th graders who have won a very competitive essay writing contest. First, second, and third prize winners in each grade read their winning essays. Let me tell you, these are talented kids who already are thoughtfully looking at how they view some of our society's toughest issues. Here are a few of the questions they chose to write on:

- Should a school child be allowed to attend a neighborhood school instead of being bussed across town to achieve racial diversity at a school in a different neighborhood?



Sixth-grade Law Day winners receive their awards. Pictured from left to right: Nora Hyun Long Katterman, Slauson Middle School; Marlin L. Koetje, The Gagie School; Nivine H. El-Hor, Tappan Middle School; Justice Stephen J. Markman, Michigan Supreme Court; Mary Ann Farris, Law Day chairperson.

Photo by Mike Smith

- Should a school be required to hire teachers who reflect the diversity in the American population, even if the most qualified teachers in the applicant pool are Caucasian males?
- Suppose that a male job candidate is slightly better qualified than a female candidate for a particular job. Should an employer be allowed to hire a lesser-qualified female candidate on the basis that the company has an under-representation of female employees?
- Should public schools in Michigan be allowed to refuse admission to the children of illegal immigrants?

Justice Markman gave a wonderful summary of the importance of our legal system founded upon separation of power, federalism, and power delegated by the people.

All in attendance were reminded that such a government has been the exception, not the rule, and the respect for individual citizen rights was truly something worth never taking for granted.

My short remarks stressed the role of attorneys in protecting and safeguarding our freedom, while helping to ensure each individual can truly take advantage of the freedoms given us all.

It was a day to honor the students. It was a day to honor our system of rule of law. It was also a day to honor the people who make that system work, and at the core of such honor rests lawyers.

It is that system and those people who make our nation one that causes its citizens to be willing to risk or even give their lives in its defense.

Share your thoughts/concerns

Please forward comments to
voice@mail.michbar.org

It truly was a great day—an uplifting day. I wish each of you could have been present. This job of lawyering can be at times tiring, even exhausting. It can be stressful and it can be discouraging. It, however, can be and is so much more. On May 3 we were reminded what a great part each of you plays in making this system of justice work.

Thank You.

P.S. I used my few moments to do an unpaid advertisement to those talented kids to think about obtaining a legal education and becoming a lawyer. I intend to follow up my contact with them. I was truly moved by their talent, but more so by their hearts! Here they are:

6th GRADE:

1st PLACE

Nora Hyun Long Katterman
Slauson Middle School
Ann Arbor
Teacher: Ms. Donna Davison

2nd PLACE

Nivine H. El-Hor
Tappan Middle School
Ann Arbor
Teacher: Ms. Wendy Ramond

3rd PLACE

Marlin L. Koetje
The Gagie School
Kalamazoo
Teacher: Mr. Joe Meyers

7th GRADE:

1st PLACE

Courtney R. Roddy
Kuehn-Haven Middle School
Montrose
Teacher: Mr. Bryan Moody

2nd PLACE

Diamond Marie Chandler
Paw Paw Middle School
Paw Paw
Teacher: Ms. Lynette Brown

3rd PLACE

Bryan Alan Banks
Cadillac Middle School
Detroit
Teacher: Ms. Dierdre Wells

8th GRADE:

1st PLACE

Christopher William Copple
Northeast Middle School
Midland
Teacher: Mrs. Connie Altimore

2nd PLACE

Elasha E. Wallace
Robichaud Sr./Jr. High
Dearborn Heights
Teacher: Mrs. Blessing

3rd PLACE

Mario L. Admon
L'Anse Creuse Middle School
Macomb
Teacher: Mr. Keith Wieand ◆