



MY OPINION

BY TERRY TOTTEHAM

PRESIDENT, STATE BAR OF TEXAS

Learning from Local Counsel

Perhaps the best preparation I had for *serv*ing as State Bar president was *run*ning for State Bar president. In the spring of 2009, I had the privilege of campaigning across the state. I met thousands of Texas lawyers who represented all sizes of law firms and all types of law practices. I learned a lot about Texas lawyers and the challenges they face. A month on the road renewed my appreciation for the diverse resources of our great state. It also reinforced my respect for the principles and beliefs we hold in common.

The State Bar of Texas relies heavily on the input, involvement, and initiative of lawyers at the local level. To paraphrase former U.S. House Speaker Tip O'Neill, "All bar work is local." Hundreds of local bar associations and young lawyer affiliates work hard to develop and implement programs that benefit local communities. Grievance panels made up of lawyers and public members ensure that our disciplinary system is administered fairly and impartially. Participants in lawyer referral programs provide legal representation to underserved areas of the state. Legal aid lawyers and pro bono volunteers work tirelessly to ensure that our most vulnerable citizens have access to basic legal services.

Over the next few months, there are several additional areas in which the State Bar will be relying on the involvement of local lawyers to better assist members and the clients we serve:

DISCIPLINARY RULES

When the Supreme Court of Texas

asked the State Bar Board of Directors to recommend whether or not lawyers should be required to disclose to clients whether they carry professional liability insurance, the State Bar convened a series of public hearings around the state. Lawyers and members of the public showed up in seven cities to express their opinions and to hear what others had to say. State Bar directors consulted with the members in their districts. Lawyers and nonlawyers posted comments to the State Bar website. The State Bar conducted focus groups and administered surveys. The Board wanted to ensure that all voices were heard so that it could make an informed decision. At the conclusion of the process, the Court thanked the Bar for its efforts to gather and share input from a wide range of stakeholders.

The Supreme Court has once again called on the State Bar to make a recommendation. This time, the Court wants the State Bar's input on proposed changes to the Texas Disciplinary Rules of Professional Conduct. Last fall, proposed rules were printed in the *Texas Bar Journal* for public comment. In response to feedback, the Court has revised the proposed rules, which are available at www.supreme.courts.state.tx.us/rules/rules.asp.

In August and September, the State Bar will hold public hearings around the state on the proposed changes to the disciplinary rules. This will lead to a likely referendum of all Texas lawyers in the fall. Please check the State Bar website, www.texasbar.com, for a list of public hearing dates and locations.

VETERANS INITIATIVE

*Come back home to the refinery
Hiring man says, "Son, if it was up to me"
I go down to see the VA man
He said, "Son, don't you understand"*
— Bruce Springsteen, "Born in the USA"

I am proud to be launching *Texas Lawyers for Texas Veterans*, an initiative to provide legal services to our nation's veterans. We are working with local bar associations, mental health professionals, veterans organizations, and VA hospitals to set up pro bono clinics. We are also training lawyers to assist with appeals. The program is up and running in Houston, Dallas, San Antonio, El Paso, and Austin. During the Bar Leaders Conference in Houston this month, we will present "Clinics in a Box" to local bars. Please contact your local bar association about ways that you can help.

WELLNESS INITIATIVE

Practicing law can be challenging. Often, the people in the best position to realize when we are struggling with substance abuse or depression are our friends and families and the colleagues, judges, and staff members we interact with everyday. The Texas Lawyers' Assistance Program helps refer lawyers, judges, and law students to local programs. In coming months, we will release a DVD, *Practicing Law and Wellness: Modern Strategies for the Lawyer Dealing with Anxiety, Addiction, and Depression*. For more information, visit www.texasbar.com/tlap. ❖