



## MY OPINION

BY BOB BLACK

PRESIDENT, STATE BAR OF TEXAS

# Spending Your Dollars Wisely

Among the most challenging yet reassuring aspects of serving as president-elect of the State Bar of Texas is the opportunity to scrutinize the State Bar budget. During four years on the Board of Directors, including a year as chair, I reviewed proposed budgets, financial statements, and audit reports, but it was not until I tried to determine how the State Bar might do things differently that I fully realized how much the State Bar accomplishes with its resources. Traveling the state, I occasionally hear from lawyers who suspect the State Bar of all sorts of waste and extravagance. It just isn't true. I would like to share with you a few statistics that I find heartening and educational about programs the State Bar coordinates to help members and the public.

### Using Technology

In 1999, there were approximately 65,000 members of the State Bar, served by 324 State Bar employees, or one employee for every 199 lawyers. Today, there are 88,000 lawyers supported by just 268 staff, or one employee for every 329 lawyers. This is a 65 percent improvement. Through the adoption of new technologies and careful stewardship of resources, the State Bar has been able to do more with less and do it well.

### Low Administrative Costs

The State Bar devotes roughly 20 percent of its expenditures to administrative costs — areas such as accounting, human resources, information technology, and customer service. Comparably sized bar associations in other states spend up to

twice that percentage on administrative costs. To put this number in perspective, approximately 27 percent of the State Bar's expenditures go toward professional development; another 24 percent is dedicated to protection of the public (primarily through administration of the attorney discipline system); 10 percent supports attorney compliance (MCLE and advertising review); and 5 percent goes toward legal services support. Where does the money come from? Roughly half of the revenue is generated by lawyer dues, a quarter from continuing legal education programs, and the remainder from advertising and fees.

Perhaps the most impressive statistic is that the State Bar has *not* raised dues in 20 years. For all of the great programs the State Bar provides — from public information pamphlets for consumers, to law-related education programs for students and teachers, to administrative support for sections — it does so by adhering to an austere budget with stringent oversight and controls.

### High Return on Investment

The State Bar has dozens of programs to assist members and the public. To give you an idea of the breadth of the State Bar's services during the past year, consider the following:

- Attorney participation in the Lawyer Referral Information Service increased by more than 20 percent. LRIS made 67,000 referrals to participating attorneys, local referral services, and legal aid providers or other community service groups.

- The Free Legal Information page on the State Bar website averaged 6,500 hits per month. In addition, 7,332 pamphlets were distributed.
- The Membership Department saw a 30 percent increase in the number of attorneys electing to receive their statements electronically. Online payment increased by 25 percent.
- The State Bar Law-Related Education Department trained more than 7,000 teachers, principally in civics, including the role of the judiciary to our profession.
- The MCLE department received 447,500 attendance records. Seventy percent were received through online reporting and compliance sites for sponsors and members.
- The State Bar underwrote the Champions of Justice Gala for Veterans so that all \$400,000 raised would go directly to legal services for veterans. In addition, the State Bar funds a student loan repayment program, which provides 140 legal aid lawyers with \$400 per month toward their student loans.

Day in and day out, the volunteers and staff of the State Bar of Texas work hard to ensure that they carry out the organization's mission. They serve members and the public through exceptional programs and sound financial management. These are tough economic times and we have a responsibility to use your dollars wisely. I am proud of how well we do, but vigilant that we keep this uppermost in mind. ★