



MY OPINION

BY BUCK FILES

PRESIDENT, STATE BAR OF TEXAS

Mentoring the Next Generation

We've all heard horror stories about the problems that our new lawyers face. There are not enough jobs to go around and, for many, their indebtedness from student loans is overwhelming. I had not seen any empirical data, though, until I read Lincoln Caplan's "An Existential Crisis for Law Schools." (*The New York Times*, July 15, 2012).

Caplan refers to an analysis of data from the American Bar Association by Professor William D. Henderson of the Indiana University Maurer School of Law. Professor Henderson concluded that 55 percent of the 2011 law school graduates were employed in positions that required the passing of a bar examination; 8 percent obtained jobs helped by a law degree; 16 percent were underemployed (part-time, short-term, or nonprofessional); 12 percent were unemployed; 4 percent had obtained professional non-legal jobs; 2 percent had entered graduate school; and there were no statistics for the other 3 percent.

Caplan also refers to Brian Tamanaha's "Failing Law Schools," in which he reports that in-state *annual* tuition at public law schools increased from \$2,006 in 1985 to \$18,472 in 2009. Tuition at private law schools during the same years increased from \$7,526 to \$35,743.

Caplan noted that for those law school graduates from 2010, 90 percent had significant debt — with the *average* being \$98,500. To retire this indebtedness would require a monthly payment of \$1,200 for 10 years.

I talked to one of Tyler's wisest — and kindest — bankers about what his reaction would be to a loan application

from a new lawyer with \$98,000 in student loan debt. What would this lawyer's chances be of borrowing money to purchase a home? He was not optimistic.

The State Bar of Texas is working on ways to ensure that law students are aware of the costs of law school, the risk of student loans, and the reality of the job market.

The State Bar of Texas is working on ways to ensure that law students are aware of the costs of law school, the risk of student loans, and the reality of the job market. Each new lawyer receives a packet from the State Bar that sets out all the benefits of membership, with an emphasis on what is immediately available to them — and the word that the Texas Young Lawyers Association is eager to welcome them with open arms.

What new lawyers who have been forced to hang out a shingle and go it alone need most is good mentoring. At the Bar Leaders Conference in July, I heard representatives of the Austin, Houston, and San Antonio Bar Associations discussing their excellent mentoring programs. I was so impressed that I came back to Tyler and volunteered for our program. I could not ask any of you to be mentors if I was just going to sit on the sidelines.

Jimmy Brill of Houston is a legend for his mentoring work. For 18 years, he has met for breakfast on a monthly basis with 15 to 35 young lawyers to discuss with them the challenges of the practice of law. He sets a high standard for all of us.

I hope that we do not reach the day when the children of the economically advantaged and the academically gifted — who can receive scholarship assistance — are the only ones who can afford a law school education. The citizens of the state of Texas deserve a Bar whose membership reflects the demographics of the state. ❖

MythBusters

The Myth: The State Bar of Texas influences the number of students admitted to the study of law and, later, to the practice of law.

The Problem: We are in hard economic times. New lawyers are having difficulty finding employment and many lawyers are seeing a decline in their income. Approximately 7,590 law students are beginning a new semester at our nine Texas law schools. What jobs will be there for them? Many lawyers believe that the State Bar has the ability to control the number of students who are being admitted to Texas law schools as well as the ability to control the percentage of graduates who pass our Bar examinations.

The Truth: It isn't so. Each law school determines how many students will be admitted each semester. The State Bar of Texas does not control how the Texas Board of Law Examiners will administer or grade the Bar examinations.