



By Barry H. Grodsky

# Address to the Members

## Remarks from the Installation on June 9, 2018:

It is with the greatest sense of humility that I begin my term as the 78th president of the Louisiana State Bar Association (LSBA). I am both humbled and honored. This is a journey which started 36 years ago — being sworn in and taking an oath as poignant and important then as it is now. On this path through a legal career, two things have become very clear.

First, it is very hard to be a lawyer. Getting in and staying in law school is a challenge as well as the looming Bar Exam now made even more difficult with the onerous character and fitness component. Combine that with student debt and the difficult job market and we have seen the stress of law school carry over for many into the practice of law.

We all deal with the problems of finding and keeping clients, making our partners happy, billing hours but still trying to achieve a good work-life balance. With economic concerns, lawyers are working longer than ever before. Factor into all of that our obligation of maintaining appropriate ethical standards and aspiring to be as professional as we can. Indeed, it is hard to be a lawyer.

But, despite it all, the second thing I've learned is I am proud to be a lawyer. I am proud to have the capability to right a wrong, to give advice to the worried client, to offer guidance in times of need. I am proud to stand up for someone unsure of his rights and how to express them. I am proud to be able to explain difficult concepts, and even have some fun doing it. I remember a great conversation with a know-it-all Philadelphia lawyer who

was so confused when I told him that we cannot do a deed in lieu of foreclosure in Louisiana and then I explained to him what a *dation en paiement* is.

I am proud to use my legal skills and training in different ways such as to serve on the board of a non-profit corporation or a civic group. I have taught business law classes and have given many CLEs. I often get calls from friends and colleagues to ask a question about an area of law in which I practice but with which they are unfamiliar and they just need some advice and guidance. I am proud to know that, with such relationships, I can call upon them when needed.

I am very proud of my service to the Bar, from being on committees, chairing one, giving CLEs, becoming secretary and now president. And the best part is that every lawyer reading this, in his/her own way, is deep-down also proud to be a lawyer.

So, "how does all of this fit into the Bar Association and what can the Bar do for members to ease the burden of practicing law and provide a forum and tools to make members even better and prouder?" I know firsthand what the Bar does and, truly, it is formidable if we just tap into it. But we cannot simply rely on the Bar as it is. As Bob Dylan said, "The times they are a-changing." Keeping in line with my favorite musicians, I channeled my inner Jimmy Buffett and know there must be "Changes in Latitudes, Changes in Attitudes," hence the theme of the Annual Meeting.

How does this work? We have all developed certain ideals and beliefs as lawyers — our attitudes. But we have to ask, "Is this the best we can do?" My background in the Bar has been in professional-

ism and that is where our attitudes can get better. One of my goals has already been achieved. Through the Committee on the Profession, our Code of Professionalism has been updated, revised and brought into the 21st century. It had remained the same for 25 years and the updated Code has been approved by the Supreme Court order. Hopefully, it will change our attitudes.

We must be mindful of those not yet admitted into the practice. We have already created programs for our law schools with more on the way. We need to address topics such as debt service to help those about to become lawyers. Our award-winning character and fitness program not only helps students through the Bar admission process but also helps them recognize that sometimes a helping hand is needed. In that regard, we have strengthened, and will continue to support, our Judges and Lawyers Assistance Program (JLAP), not just for lawyers and judges but for students, paraprofessionals and their families. JLAP is an integral component of what we do as professionals.

Our attitude also must support those just embarking on their legal careers and ensure that their path can be made easier. The Transition Into Practice (TIP) mentoring program is now statewide and we are looking to create programs to assist two-year to seven-year practitioners. We all must be aware of the needs of younger lawyers and have better attitudes towards helping them.

Our attitudes must be better about helping those who cannot help themselves — the poor, the disenfranchised, those who cannot afford legal representation and see the door as closed for help. Access to jus-

tice is at a critical stage and we must have a positive attitude to recognize and assist. Funding is critical. We are one of only three states to give no money for access to justice causes, but our efforts must never stop. We must support the legal services corporations and those who unselfishly engage in pro bono work and be creative in helping those who simply cannot help themselves. We will develop and work on programs such as the Modest Means Directory, call centers, Wills for Heroes, Lawyers in Libraries and help desks. As lawyers, we have a duty to assist, and more can and must be done, perhaps with a bit of a change in attitude.

We are seen often as “just a mandatory Bar;” our members have to belong. Our attitude has to change on that as well. Many would be amazed at all the services the Bar offers. We will get this message out statewide through our outreach efforts.

But, what about the “changes in latitudes?” The Bar cannot stay where it is; we must grow, identify and address the needs of an ever-changing membership and keep up with the times. The goals of our previous Long-Term Strategic Plan have been met, so we will embark on this project again. Soon, a committee will begin work on a new Long-Term Strategic Plan, focusing on what the Bar hopes to achieve over the next two years, two to four years, and beyond four years. It will serve as a road map for where the Bar is heading. President-Elect Bob Kutcher will be instrumental in this endeavor.

To move forward, we have to address specific members of our Bar. No group is expanding as quickly as senior lawyers and they have unique needs and issues to consider. The creation of a Senior Lawyers Division was a significant first step. That division will be tasked to consider the special needs of its members and determine what the Bar can do to assist. No doubt senior lawyers and young lawyers can learn from each other and such programming could be mutually beneficial. Senior lawyers are ideal mentors for the TIP program. I am appreciative of the work of all of the division’s leaders.

We have to expand our efforts for inclusion and diversity and be sure that this message is delivered statewide. We have to address timely issues like wellness, social media and cyber security.



**2018-19 LSBA President Barry H. Grodsky addresses the crowd at the 2018 Annual Meeting in Destin, Fla. Photo by Matthew Hinton Photography.**

We must recognize and address challenges to mandatory bar associations. This is a real and legitimate concern and our course forward must focus on what a mandatory bar can and cannot do. In this regard, having specific regulatory functions now back under the Bar’s umbrella, such as legal specialization and mandatory continuing legal education, is very important.

Standing still is simply not an option.

There is one other thing of which I am absolutely certain. This year is NOT about me. This year is about fulfilling the Bar’s mission to the fullest — serving the public and serving the profession.

This year is about doing everything the Bar can to help those citizens who cannot obtain full access to our courts.

This year is about recognizing and strengthening even more our wonderful relationship with our Supreme Court and its Justices.

This year is about doing all we can for those involved in the law, whether it be to assist law students aiming to become lawyers, to help young attorneys get on their way, to help senior lawyers with specialized needs, to assist those with personal problems through JLAP, to offer quality education services, great programs and an opportunity to be involved with the Bar.

This year is about reaching out to all lawyers in all parts of the state, large firms, small firms and everything in between, to

let them know the Bar is here for them.

This year is about developing leaders for our future.

This year is about touting our accomplishments and letting others know what our members have done, both in and out of the practice of law.

This year is about creating a path forward for the Bar and its members.

This year is about working with and continuing our strong relationships with other affiliated entities such as the Louisiana Bar Foundation and local/specialty bars.

No one could possibly get to this point without significant support and assistance. I am certainly no exception. LSBA Executive Director Loretta Larsen, the other LSBA directors and the staff are the unsung heroes whose tireless efforts keep the organization running.

We are also blessed to have many very involved past presidents, a collegial group still committed to promoting the Bar and its mission. To steal a line from Darrel Papillion’s remarks when he became president, I too feel that I am standing on the shoulders of giants. I have sought advice from many in this group and no doubt will continue to do so.

Our strength too comes from Bar leadership. We are fortunate to have a dedicated and hard-working Board which will soon be called upon to undertake specific tasks to ensure our goals are met. I am also proud of the work of all of our committees and sections.

I have learned much about Bar governance through the work of the Executive Committee. This, of course, leads to the wonderful year of our dedicated President Dona Kay Renegar.

I also must acknowledge the support I receive from my wife Cheri (who has been instrumental in my Bar involvement), my beautiful daughter Caroline (who will keep me young and on my toes), my family, friends and law firm colleagues. I thank them all for joining me on this great journey.

This is a great and noble profession and I am honored for this opportunity. When it’s done, as Jimmy Buffett would say, “I’m heading for a cheeseburger in paradise.”