

Samuel W. Seymour, President
New York City Bar
Annual Meeting Address
May 18, 2010

Thank you, Pat. And thank you above all for your outstanding leadership over the past two years. Because of your wise and steady stewardship, you are handing the Association over in robust good health, despite the great economic upheaval during your term. You have burnished the sterling reputation of the New York City Bar Association during your presidency, and you have continued its proud tradition of service to the public and the profession. For that distinguished service and your many valuable contributions, Pat, every member of this Association owes you deep gratitude.

I am in turn grateful to the Association for the opportunity to serve as its next president. It is at the same time a tremendous honor and a daunting challenge – and I must admit that I relish both. Over the past several weeks I've had the chance to meet with many of the former presidents of this Association to seek their wisdom and guidance for the task ahead. To become an heir to that extraordinary tradition of service and leadership is the greatest professional tribute imaginable. It is such an honor to join that long, gray, pin-striped line of succession, and I will do my best to uphold its finest traditions.

In addition to the valuable advice I have received from Pat and the former presidents, I must acknowledge two of my new partners at the Association. Executive Director Barbara Berger Opatowsky and General Counsel Alan Rothstein are, for those of you who know this place, the real reasons the Association achieves so much. The talented and dedicated employees of the Association truly are the backbone of this fine organization. And I look forward to working closely with you, Barbara and Alan, and the rest of your wonderful staff.

My own affiliation with the City Bar Association began even before I graduated from law school. After my first year of law school, I was a summer intern for the City Bar's Special Committee on Criminal Justice. My summer job was to run a city-wide crime prevention program. With a rented car, a videotape presentation and a stack of informational brochures and posters, I drove around the city to meet with community groups in all five boroughs. We handed out whistles and booklets as part of a program called, "blow the whistle on crime." I had moved to New York City the year before to start law school, and as some of you will remember, New York was a bit grittier in late 1970s. I grew up in small town in Indiana, so my tour of some New York neighborhoods came as a bit of shock.

My crime prevention outreach work for the City Bar gave me an amazing opportunity to explore the city while addressing community groups and meeting with police anti-crime experts and neighborhood leaders. During one of my daily rounds downtown that summer, I realized I was not in Indiana anymore when I saw my all-time favorite bit of graffiti on a wall: "Give me lithium or give me meth!" I also learned some lessons about property crime first-hand that summer, as my rental car, which was parked on the street in Morningside Heights, had its trunk jimmed open one evening. I've always wondered about the reaction of the person who opened the trunk only to find 500 posters saying "blow the whistle on crime".

Since that auspicious start, my involvement with the City Bar Association has taught me many things. Over the years, I joined several committees, served as chair of some of them, and became active in the City Bar Justice Center, our *pro bono* affiliate. These activities helped me appreciate that lawyers have a wider role, beyond simply representing paying clients. And I learned about our broader role not because anyone told me it was so, but because I saw it myself in the actions of the members of this Association. I came to appreciate the essential fact that, as

lawyers, we are the primary custodians of the rule of law. It has been said many ways, but it comes down to this: if the lawyers won't take responsibility for that crucial intersection between the law as a principle and the administration of justice in everyday life, who will? Programs ensuring access to justice are often politically unpopular and carry a true cost to taxpayers. If our profession will not protect and promote those programs, they will not survive.

Our profession therefore has a special obligation to speak out and to take action on the very same issues that led to the formation of this Association 140 years ago: improving our system of justice, making that system equally accessible to all, and ensuring an independent and adequately funded judiciary. It falls uniquely on our shoulders as lawyers to make certain that the firmest pillar of good government – that is, the true administration of justice – stands strong. For an individual lawyer, that is asking too much – but we are 23,000 members strong. Our collective voice is heard in the places where law and policy are made, and this Association has frequently taken a stand and made a difference. I will do my utmost to uphold those great traditions of the Association during my tenure as president.

In recent weeks, I've been asked by several people about my priorities for my upcoming term as president. What things do you want to change, they've asked, and what is your highest priority? It reminds me of the barrister who is arguing an appeal to the High Court. The barrister begins his argument: "My Lords, I have three points on appeal: one is a sure winner, one is hopeless, and one has a middling chance." The presiding judge interrupts: "Counselor, just give us your argument on the most difficult point and get on with it." "Oh, no, My Lord," the barrister replies, "I'm not going to tell you which is which."

I will tell you that my priorities include pressing forward with the core values of the Association, and in that respect I will closely follow Pat Hynes' excellent leadership. Above all,

as an organization we stand for ensuring equal access to justice, and through the work of the City Bar Justice Center and many other initiatives, we put those principles into action. These core positions will include a continuing commitment to diversity in our profession, in the membership of this Association, and in our courts. In the pro bono field, I am proud of the leadership role we have taken in the area of immigration reform, as Barbara mentioned a few minutes ago, and that work certainly will continue.

The City Bar Justice Center, under its director Lynn Kelly and Board chair Austin Fragomen, has sponsored another innovative program worth reflecting on. The Veterans Assistance Program was launched in 2007 to assist veterans of the armed forces who are seeking disability benefits or challenging denials of benefits before the Department of Veterans Affairs. Our clinics have served veterans of overseas service, from Afghanistan to World War II. We work closely with the Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs and other advocacy groups, and the Justice Center has trained over 400 volunteer lawyers in this program. Hundreds of men and women who were receiving less than they deserved for physical and psychological injuries suffered in military service have won their cases, and received the benefits they were entitled to, because a talented, well-trained *pro bono* lawyer took on their case under this program. This program, together with so many others reaching out to the under-served and unrepresented, will continue to be a focus in the next two years.

This Association also stands for an independent judiciary, and we have many longstanding initiatives to promote and improve the administration of justice. And we are in good company: former Justice Sandra Day O'Connor spoke from his podium last month, and her message was clear. She said, "you New Yorkers have some work to do" in order to ensure that electoral politics do not undermine the independence of New York courts. After the event, I

met with Justice O'Connor briefly and told her of our longstanding commitment to court reform and our alignment with the Fund for Modern Courts agenda. She cut me off and said with a smile: "just get it done." So we have our assignment.

In her speech, Justice O'Connor described a closely related commitment to education on basic civics. She is a prime mover behind an initiative known as ourcourts.org that brings civics education into middle schools. Her point is simple: if Americans don't understand the fundamentals of our system of government, the respect for and ultimately the independence of our judiciary will be at risk. Her organization fosters constitutional workshops and discussions among middle school students. But Justice O'Connor has work to do too, because she said that at one recent workshop an 8th grader asked whether the Second Amendment right to bear arms means that she can wear a sleeveless T-shirt to school.

We also have some work to do in order to keep pace with the rapid changes in the legal profession. New technologies, new economic realities, increased professional demands – all these things are affecting how lawyers carry out their professional obligations and live their lives. As a bar association, we must be a reflection of these changes, and I intend to make a special effort to reach younger lawyers, and to recruit them as active members in the Association. Our future lies with lawyers who see the world in a way that is different from the generations that came before. This generation inherits a world with entirely new paradigms about job security, social networking, the speed and nature of communications. They are the future of the profession for certain; I want to make sure they are also the future of this Association. So many members of the Association have told me that they began their own involvement here, as I did, early in their careers, as a member of a committee or volunteer in a program. If that tradition of early involvement at the City Bar is broken, our future is in peril.

Fortunately, we already have many great things to offer young lawyers. Programs for training, mentoring and networking provide career development opportunities specially designed for new lawyers. I plan to meet with and listen carefully to lawyers in the first decade of their practice, and to work to meet their expectations. One of our members was asked recently by a young lawyer, how can you afford to take the time to be a member of a committee at the City Bar Association? The member's answer captures a great deal: how can you afford not to? I have every confidence that we will be a home for the profession in the 21st Century.

Our legal world is also moving from cross-border considerations to a borderless world. Again, our work at the Association must continue to reflect the increasingly international aspects of our profession. We are a bar association of the City of New York, but our city is a global capital of commerce, finance, and law – some say it is the Capital of the World. This Association has a tradition of being heard on legal and policy issues that reach far beyond the city limits and I intend to increase that global footprint. We have effectively addressed matters of public policy abroad, through our international human rights work, for example, and the visionary *pro bono* initiatives of the Vance Center for International Justice. At the same time we also have committees dedicated to cross-border commercial practice, including a committee on international dispute resolution and a new committee on international business transactions. In our new flat world, not to mention hot and crowded, our Association will be looking for new ways to have our voice heard on important international issues.

Finally, I must note that we do our excellent work primarily through the Association's many committees. A former City Bar president once said that our committees are the "muscles" of the Association, and they should not only be flexed, but well exercised and used. I have had the pleasure of meeting with many of the committee chairs in recent weeks, and I am happy to see

so many of them here this evening. The breadth of our committee work is staggering: the current activities of our committees takes us to the cutting edge of issues in national security, legal ethics, human rights, derivatives regulation, judicial nominations, NYC charter revision, taxation, and climate change, to name a few. We cover aeronautics to zoning -- and virtually everything in between. I thank all the committee chairs and members for their dedication and service, and look forward to our work together.

My years of experience at this Association have taught me one more important lesson: don't get longwinded up here when there is a reception set up in the next room. So I want to close now by acknowledging a few of the people whose support and friendship have allowed me this wonderful honor.

To my partners and colleagues from Sullivan & Cromwell, thank you for being here this evening and for your steadfast support. I must single out Michael Cooper, a former president of this Association, who has been a special friend and mentor. I also must acknowledge Rodge Cohen, the Senior Chairman of our firm who is here this evening. Sullivan & Cromwell has been my professional home for almost thirty years, and I think it's good to let me out of the house for a little while.

My family is also well represented here tonight, and I know they are united in one thought: utter astonishment that the Indiana teenager they once knew is standing up here. This includes my parents Polly and Thaddeus, who made the trek from Florida. They are two remarkable individuals who inspire a fan club far beyond their own adoring children, including my brother and my three sisters who are here, having traveled from Florida and North Carolina today. And my aunt and uncle, Mike and Catryna Seymour, and their two daughters are here. They too have been great mentors, supporters, and fellow egg nog makers. Annabel, Walton and

Ben, thanks for coming to share this evening with your father. And finally gratitude does not begin to express my feelings for my wife Karen, the truest partner a person ever had.

There is one final family member I must acknowledge. In that long line of former Association presidents is my grandfather, Whitney North Seymour, who stood at this very spot in May 1950 to become City Bar president. Whit was an inspiration to many lawyers in his long and illustrious career, and he taught me the enduring lesson that it is possible to be an effective lawyer and also a compassionate person. Whit proved many times over that one can be a successful litigator and still treat others with professional respect and personal decency. Whit also instilled in me the value of working with the organized bar to improve our justice system for all. It took me all these years to realize that these were not his values, but lessons he learned from his mentors and predecessors, including here at the City Bar. That wonderful line of tradition reaches back to the very roots of our profession in this country. Despite all the changes underway in our world today, and despite the shifting frame of reference for our profession, let us remain true to those fine traditions.

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