

# President's Message

WILLIAM N. LAFORGE

## YOU Be the Judge

**M**ANY OF THE public policy issues in which the Federal Bar Association engages—the positions we take and the advocacy we provide—focus on the federal judiciary and on our FBA colleagues who serve in federal government positions. A quick look

at the FBA Government Relations Issues Agenda ([www.fedbar.org/agenda.html](http://www.fedbar.org/agenda.html)) reveals the association's solid commitment to these key membership constituencies, both of which happen to be absolutely critical to our system of government and the functioning of our judicial branch, not to mention to all of our members and those whom we serve and represent.

But have you ever wondered about the federal judges who belong to the Federal Bar Association? Why do they belong to the association, and what do they do that is beyond the scope of their official judicial duties?

Many of these members have been featured in profiles in *The Federal Lawyer*, and we will continue the policy of spotlighting members of the federal judiciary from around the country. These profiles not only tell us about outstanding lawyers who made it to the federal bench but also let us in on fascinating characteristics and interests that remind us that these judges are human.

The FBA proudly counts among its membership approximately 1,300 federal judges, including Article I and III appointees. We all know or can imagine the demands on their time and the level of responsibility that they shoulder. But if you think that all these judges are merely passive FBA members, you need to think again. You might be surprised at the level of engagement and the extent of commitment to the FBA on the part of a number of our members who serve on the federal bench. Many judges, who may or may not ever be featured in the profile section of this magazine, are very involved with this association at various levels, and, in many cases, are unsung heroes.

One of my recent chapter visits, actually prior to becoming president of the association, was to our Inland Empire Chapter in southern California, where I represented the FBA and spoke at the enrobing of U.S. District Judge Stephen Larsen. The occasion of a judicial installation alone justifies the presence and participation of FBA national leadership. But, in this case, we were also honoring a man who served as

his chapter's president while serving as a federal magistrate.

Other former chapter presidents include U.S. District Judge Susan Lee of Chattanooga, Magistrate Judge Arlander Keys of Chicago, U.S. District Judge Michael Davis of the Minnesota Chapter, and Magistrate Judge Robert Bacharach of Oklahoma City, who was also the FBA's 2006 recipient of the revered Kintner Award for outstanding service and serves on the association's Bench-Bar Committee. Judge Gustavo Gelpi of Puerto Rico, who served as his chapter's president during his tenure as a magistrate judge, is now one of the newest district court judges in the United States. Judge Gelpi continues his commitment to the FBA in an exemplary fashion and at a high level through his service on the FBA's national Board of Directors, where he is a wonderful resource and inspiration.

Current chapter presidents who serve on the federal bench include U.S. District Judge Dennis Green of our Del Rio, Texas, Chapter, and Magistrate Judge Pamela Mathy of our San Antonio Chapter. Judge Mathy also serves on the FBA Resolutions Committee. U.S. District Judge Arthur Boylan is president-elect of our Minnesota Chapter. Magistrate Judge Irma Ramirez serves as secretary of the Dallas Chapter. The FBA's New Orleans Chapter boasts active involvement by several federal court judges, including U.S. District Judge Carl Barbier, who serves on the chapter's board and has been a speaker at the chapter's leadership training programs.

In the realm of service on FBA divisions, sections, and committees, Chief U.S. District Judge William Downes of Wyoming chairs the Bench-Bar Committee, having picked up the baton passed to him by U.S. District Judge Elizabeth Kovachevich of Tampa. Judge Downes is also involved with the FBA's multi-state CLE programs in Wyoming, Utah, and Idaho. U.S. District Judges Barefoot Sanders of Dallas and Curtis Collier of Chattanooga have both served on the FBA's Sarah T. Hughes Award Committee. U.S. Bankruptcy Judge Harlin Hale of our Dallas Chapter



chairs the FBA Bankruptcy Section. U.S. District Judge Donovan Frank, winner of the 2006 Boots Fisher service award, is co-chair of the Minnesota Chapter's diversity committee and has spoken about the chapter's excellent work in this area at a session of the FBA's chapter leadership training program.

In many cases around the country, federal judges have been the driving force or a major inspiration behind the operations, activities, and even the founding of a chapter. Certainly, the high level of involvement of the federal bench with our chapters in New Orleans, Chattanooga, Dallas, southern California, and Minnesota serves as an enviable template for the type of relationship that can exist between our chapters and the federal judges in their area. One particularly stunning case involved Chief U.S. District Judge Lynn Winmill of Idaho, who decided that his district needed an FBA chapter and led the organizational effort to rally local lawyers to support the cause. That relatively new chapter is highly successful, and Judge Winmill remains involved with the chapter and with the FBA's multistate CLE program, which he and his chapter recently hosted.

Among those highly involved in the FBA's Judiciary Division who serve in the administrative law judiciary are Judge Arthur Liberty, Chair of the Judiciary Division and an administrative law judge at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development; Judge Daniel Solomon, a board member of the Judiciary Division and an administrative law judge at the U.S. Department of Labor; Judge Richard O'Hair, past chair and now a board member of the Judiciary Division and an administrative law judge at the U.S. Department of Education; and Judge Ronnie Yoder, past president of the District of Columbia Chapter and an administrative law judge at the U.S. Department of Transportation.

Finally, I should highlight three shining examples of judges who tirelessly and often thanklessly toil in the vineyards of FBA committee work. Judge Delissa Ridgway of the U.S. Court of International Trade in New York is a longtime FBA stalwart, who has served as chair of the FBA Public Relations and Government Relations Committees and remains an active member of the latter panel. Judge Ridgway is also a delegate to the FBA National Council, and she is serving on the FBA task force reviewing the association's sections and divisions. Although not a federal judge, Judge Michael McBride of Oklahoma serves as a judge for two Indian nations and as chair of the FBA Indian LawSection; he is also a member of the task force that is looking at the our sections and divisions. And the beloved Judge Robinson Everett, former chief judge of the U.S. Court of Military Appeals, continues to serve on the FBA Government Relations Committee and as a delegate to the FBA's National Council.

As you can readily see, the FBA roster of volunteer leaders is replete with active and engaged mem-

bers of the federal judiciary, who are full participants in the enterprise of making the Federal Bar Association more vibrant and meaningful to our membership. I have no doubt that I have omitted some stellar and key players in this process, and I ask their forgiveness.

Nevertheless, there are times when it's important to take stock of the wonderful resources an organization has, and this is one of those times. Our FBA colleagues who serve on the federal bench are providing this association with a wealth of volunteer time and leadership. Our chapters benefit from judicial receptions that afford our members the opportunity to get acquainted and rub elbows with local federal judges in venues other than a courtroom. Federal judges who serve as speakers and panelists for FBA programs do all of us a favor by sharing their experiences and the perspectives they have gained from their time on the bench.

I encourage all our chapters to engage with the federal judges in your locale in whatever forums and programs make sense. And I certainly encourage those federal judges who have not yet had an opportunity to engage with our chapters to venture out and see just how relevant and valuable your active participation in the new FBA and your local chapter can be.

As we begin a new year, I salute the members of the federal judiciary and extend the FBA's sincerest appreciation to those federal judges who are helping to make a difference in this association because of their active involvement. Cheers, and I wish each of you a happy new year! **TFL**

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bill LaFarge". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long, sweeping tail on the final letter.