

# President's Message

JAMES S. RICHARDSON SR.

## On Sections and Divisions

**A**S MANY OF you know, there are two major components to the structure of the Federal Bar Association. The first and probably most familiar component consists of the chapters and circuits.

These are determined by geographical location and resemble the structure of the federal court system. The other component is our section and division structure.

The association includes 19 sections and five divisions; the distinction between these two components is the following: sections constitute the interests of members' practice areas (for example, the Criminal Law Section); divisions consist of members in particular professional sectors (for example, the Federal Career Service Division, which is composed of government attorneys). The intent of this structure was to provide for professional development and networking without regard to a member's geographical location.

Several of our sections have developed outstanding programs. The Indian Law Conference—in its 34th year—developed by the Indian Law Section, is the outstanding program in that area of practice. The Taxation Section's two programs dealing with federal tax and insurance tax are also considered to be the premier continuing education programs for attorneys and accountants in the country. The association has been rapidly developing similar programs in the areas of labor and employment law as well as criminal law. (For those of you who are interested in such programs, please go to the FBA's Web site—[www.fedbar.org](http://www.fedbar.org)—and click on the "calendar" button. Other notices of the programs are found in *The Federal Lawyer* and on the Web pages of the section that is sponsoring the program.) In addition, most successful sections and divisions also publish newsletters, which provide timely updates on developments in the specific practice area, profiles of section members, and similar news items.

Unfortunately, there seems to be some belief that participation in sections and divisions is an "inside the beltway" activity. This view may be partly attributable to the origins of these components as committees within the FBA. As such, they were primarily composed of members who either lived or worked in the greater Washington, D.C., area. Moreover, most of the efforts of the committees and early sections were confined to the Washington area.

Today our sections and divisions have officers throughout the nation and produce programs around the country. For instance, the Labor and Employment Law Section's biannual program has been held in Puerto Rico since its inception; the annual conference of the Criminal Law Section, which previously took place in New Orleans, will be

held in New York City this year. Our work is truly national in scope, and the leadership of the sections and divisions is no longer concentrated in Washington, D.C.

All of this brings me to the point of this column. As I observed in my last column, one distinguishing characteristic of the Federal Bar Association is the opportunity for leadership. It is not necessary to slog through a long ladder to become a leader in our association. There are multiple opportunities for attorneys at all levels of practice in our chapters, and even more opportunities in our sections and divisions. A number of sections are well organized with their leadership set for a number of successive chairs, but others need a boost. We simply cannot expect the same chair to lead a section or division indefinitely. Everyone burns out sooner or later.

Moreover, we need to step back and evaluate the entire structure of the association. Are the sections and divisions that currently exist serving the needs of our members? If a given section or division is not meeting this goal, should it be reorganized, or should it be folded into a more active component? Are there areas of practice that are not represented in our sections, but should be? Should we continue to have the position of section and division coordinator a voluntary position, or have the responsibilities increased to a point that we should consider staff support on a larger scale?

These questions cannot be solved quickly. The FBA Board of Directors has conducted a preliminary review of these questions. Over the next two to three years we will move to make this component of the FBA more viable. However, we need your help. Take a look at the existing structure and get involved. Whatever the substantive area of your practice, there is a section or division that will address your interests. The association's structure provides a wonderful opportunity to network with your peers and to make contact with other attorneys who practice in your field. I strongly urge you to become involved with a section or division or to contact the national headquarters to make your interest known. **TFL**



A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "James S. Richardson Sr.". The signature is written in a cursive style with large, sweeping loops and a long horizontal tail that ends in a small arrowhead.