

President's Message

by Robert J. DeSousa



Civil Rights: An FBA Cornerstone

The American experience and experiment is unique.

We are a nation of laws, not of people. It is this concept that is the foundation of our civil rights. The precursor to our Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, tells us that we are endowed by our Creator with these rights and, very importantly, that they are inalienable. That does not mean, of course, that there are not those who would diminish our rights. Our civil rights are always a very fragile thing. This is why our system is known as an experiment!

Members of the Federal Bar Association are keenly aware of this. We know that keeping our rights is always a battle. This year, we will celebrate the sesquicentennial of the Gettysburg Address. In that address, given at the battlefield at Gettysburg on a chilly November day, Lincoln harkened back to the declaration as he focuses on what America aspires to be. When we ponder the American experience and the trials and tribulations of our experiment in civil rights, we, as lawyers, should join in the general obligation of those of our members who serve the federal government in various posts. Our fellow lawyers in federal posts all take an oath to defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies foreign—and more importantly—domestic.

We should all ponder that challenge. FBA members have the opportunity—through the Civil Rights Law Section, headed by Eileen Rosen—to focus on these precious rights. As a longtime FBA member and a Pennsylvanian, I take heed, as do you, of the famous quip of founder Benjamin Franklin. Dr. Franklin famously



said: “We have given you a Republic, let us see if you can keep it.” One of the ways we try to “keep it” is to honor those who stand out in the defense of liberty. With this in mind, under the leadership of then National President Kent Hofmeister, the FBA established the Sarah T. Hughes Civil Rights Award, named after the renowned federal district judge from Dallas, Texas. The award honors the person who promotes the advancement of civil and human rights, and who exemplifies Judge Hughes’ spirit and legacy. The nominee

should have at least 10 years of practice, be a member of good character and in good standing of a state bar association or retired, and demonstrate sustained and verifiable excellence in the legal profession. This award is a manifestation of our association’s keen interest in honoring those who protect our liberties.

This issue of *The Federal Lawyer* is dedicated to civil rights! I hope you will enjoy the issue, brush up on the latest twists and turns, and recommit yourself to helping preserve the core of our national being. I hope you will join us for the

Annual Meeting and Convention in San Juan in September when, among many other activities, the FBA will give to a worthy lawyer the coveted Hughes award and once again place the spotlight on civil rights! ☺

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert J. DeSousa". The signature is fluid and cursive.

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