



## PRESIDENT'S PAGE

SCOTT B. GARNER

# Advice to My Successor: The Best Laid Plans . . .

As 2020 comes to a close, so too does my year as President. But as all ends lead to a beginning, so the end of my presidency means the beginning of the next—that of Larisa Dinsmoor. Thus, I thought I would use my last President's Page as an opportunity to impart some advice to Larisa. Perhaps no advice from 2020 could be more appropriate than a proverb adapted from Robert Burns' poem, *To a Mouse*: "The best laid plans of mice and men often go awry."

When I penned my first President's Page a year ago, and then delivered my installation speech on Judges' Night in January, I talked about my vision for 2020. And while we accomplished much of what we set out to do, the year was quickly overtaken by a series of events that neither I nor anyone else could have predicted.

Of course, the biggest event—the one people will be talking about for years if not decades to come—was the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. I still remember in the very early days of the pandemic having long and agonizing discussions with the OCBA CEO/Executive Director, Trudy Levindofske, and the OCBA Executive Committee about whether we should cancel the in-person events coming up on our schedule—the next significant one being our March 18 retirement celebration for Judge Andrew Guilford. When we ultimately decided to cancel (or, rather, postpone), we thought we were making a hard and bold decision. By the next day, however, schools, courts, and offices were all closing, and it immediately became clear that our decision was not a difficult one at all, but rather an obvious, necessary, and even mandatory one. That is how quickly and dramatically events were unfolding in mid-March 2020.

But the OCBA's adaptation to a virtual platform for section, committee, and all other meetings was as seamless as it could be, thanks in no small part to Trudy, the OCBA's Director of Information Technology/Facilities, Dennis Slaughter, the rest of the OCBA staff, the COVID-19 Task Force chaired by Dan Robinson, and the hundreds of OCBA leaders and volunteers who were determined not to let a pandemic defeat us. In fact, through the end of September, the OCBA had put on over 175 webinars, for which 18,000 people had registered, certified 14,140 CLE hours, and held countless virtual committee and task force meetings. And while I would like to say that was my plan all along when I ran for OCBA Secretary back in 2016 and was installed as OCBA President back in January 2020, that obviously was not the case. Sure, we had talked about increasing our virtual presence as a way to increase the participation of our Generation Y members, but this certainly was not what anyone had in mind. To the contrary,

I was looking forward to attending events in person and getting to know our members face-to-face. My best laid plans.

And, of course, COVID-19 was not the only monumental event of 2020. Just two months after the COVID-19 lockdowns began, we learned of the killing of George Floyd. This set off weeks of protests and opened up a whole new and badly needed dialogue in America about racial justice. Leaders of bar associations across the nation wanted to do something, and the OCBA was no different. We quickly formed a Racial Justice Task Force chaired by Dimetria Jackson and Larisa Dinsmoor, then hosted a town hall that, based on the feedback we received, was meaningful to many who attended. Our Task Force is still in its early stages, and I have no doubt that Larisa will continue its work well into 2021 and beyond.

Of course, diversity and inclusion has long been a significant focus of our Bar, and the tireless efforts of the Diversity and Inclusion Committee have continued throughout 2020. And while continuing and even expanding those efforts was certainly one of my goals when this year began, the Racial Justice Task Force is not something I had anticipated needing—even if, with the benefit of hindsight, we should not have needed another tragic death to jumpstart those efforts.

This all leads me to the advice I would give to Larisa as she embarks on her year as president—likely without the pomp of a big, in-person Judges' Night event to announce her plans. Larisa, you should still make plans. And whatever those plans are for the upcoming year, you should work to follow through with them as best you can, whatever circumstances you encounter. But at the same time, expect the unexpected. Every past president will tell you that they spent a significant amount of time in their year dealing with a situation they neither asked for nor anticipated. Of course, I would put my unexpected circumstances up against any past president (not that it is a contest). The point is they will come, and you need to be ready for them, and you need to address them. Just as importantly, you cannot let those unexpected events derail the reasons you ran for Secretary in the first place four years ago, or the platform you tell us about as your year begins. Although the best laid plans of mice, men, women, and OCBA Presidents often go awry, we are counting on you not to let them go too awry.

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