

CAPITOL HILL HIGH POINT

After a Decade, ABA Day Continues to Grow as a Key Lobbying Effort by the Bar

RHONDA McMILLION

NEARLY 300 BAR LEADERS VISITED Capitol Hill on May 3-4 to meet with members of Congress on issues of concern to the legal profession, making this year's ABA Day in Washington, D.C., the largest ever.

The chance to meet face-to-face with congressional delegations is crucial to getting across the organized bar's views on key issues, says H. Thomas Wells Jr. of Birmingham, Ala., who has participated in every ABA Day in Washington since the event began in 1997.

"Participating in ABA Day and in the ABA's legislative advocacy program really makes a difference," says Wells, who co-chaired the planning committee this year with Carolyn B. Lamm of Washington, D.C.

"As a result of ABA Day contacts, members [of Congress] have changed their position on the Legal Services Corp.—one of the ABA's most important issues—and are now strong supporters of LSC funding," Wells says.

Increased funding for the LSC was one of four issues on which this year's ABA Day participants focused their efforts. In October, the LSC issued a report concluding that at least 80 percent of the civil legal needs of low-income Americans are not being met—a gap that may have widened even more since Hurricane Katrina. Meanwhile, President Bush has asked Congress to cut the LSC's funding in fiscal year 2007 by 5 percent, from \$326.5 million to \$310.2 million. The bipartisan LSC board of directors has requested \$411 million.

Rhonda McMillion is editor of Washington Letter, an ABA Governmental Affairs Office publication.

This column is written by the ABA Governmental Affairs Office and discusses advocacy efforts by the ABA relating to issues being addressed by Congress and the executive branch of the federal government.

These issues also were on the ABA Day agenda:

- Attorney-client privilege. The ABA is seeking congressional support for its efforts to reverse government policies that encourage federal prosecutors to pressure companies and other entities to waive attorney-client privilege and work product protections as a condition for receiving cooperation credits during investigations.

- Medical liability. The ABA opposes three medical liability bills in the Senate on grounds that they would pre-empt state laws and restrict damages for patients.

- Immigration. The ABA supports comprehensive immigration policy reform that enhances border protections and national security while providing a path to permanent residence for undocumented laborers currently in the United States. The ABA opposes elimination of administrative and judicial review for immigrants, criminalization of civil immigration violations, and mandatory and/or indefinite detention.



Thomas Wells has participated in ABA Day from its inception.

NAME RECOGNITION

IN CONJUNCTION WITH ITS lobbying efforts, the association recognized Sen. Mike DeWine, R-Ohio, for his long record of improving the justice system's approach to child abuse, neglect cases and foster care, and for his strong advocacy for the Violence Against Women Act.

The ABA also recognized Sen. Barbara Ann Mikulski, D-Md., for her long-standing support for the LSC, including her determined effort in 2005 to restore funding for the corporation.

The ABA presented the first Grassroots Advocacy Awards to lawyer John D. Robb of Albuquerque, N.M., the Lawyers' Campaign for Equal Justice in Oregon, and the Texas Access to Justice Commission. The awards recognize their work with the

ABA on federal legislative issues.

At the annual ABA Day breakfast session, Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Arlen Specter, R-Pa., and Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, D-Mass., praised the ABA's new policy on domestic electronic surveillance and reiterated their support for the LSC. Rachel L. Brand, assistant attorney general in the Justice Department's Office of Legal Policy, described department priorities. ■