

Final Remarks to the Board of Governors

by Charles L. Ruffin

The bylaws of the State Bar of Georgia specify the duties of the president. One of the responsibilities is to “deliver a report at the Annual Meeting of the members of the activities of the State Bar during his or her term in office and furnish a copy of the report to the Supreme Court of Georgia.” Following is the report from 2013-14 President Charles L. Ruffin on his year, delivered June 6, at the State Bar’s Annual Meeting.

Good morning. As I have the opportunity to preside over a meeting of the Board of Governors one final time, I wish to once again express my appreciation for the privilege of serving as the 51st president of the State Bar of Georgia.

In fact, that will be the sole focus of my remarks this morning. To those who have worked so hard to make this past year a successful time of historical observance—as we have celebrated not only the 50th anniversary of the State Bar of Georgia, but the 225th anniversary of the ratification of the U.S. Constitution—to all who participated this year, I simply want to say “thank you.” The fact of the matter is, the State Bar of Georgia is a huge team made up of many leaders who in their own geographic area and areas of practice contribute greatly to an orderly system of justice that is of incalculable benefit to our society.

50th Anniversary Celebration

First, I want to thank my wife Sally for driving me all over Georgia and being willing to spend 24/7 with me to the point she could give my standard remarks by heart. I also want to thank the attorneys and staff with whom I am privileged to work with for carrying on our practice so I could serve in this capacity: they are Ivy Cadle, Hope Martin, Chase Ruffin, Shanique Harris and Twila Brown.



Photo by Sarah L. Coole

2013-14 President Charles L. Ruffin addresses the Board of Governors and others in attendance during the Annual Meeting.

In January, during the Midyear Meeting of the State Bar in Atlanta, we enjoyed a wonderful celebration of the 50th anniversary of the unified Bar. More than 400 Bar members and guests attended the Gala, at which we announced the presentation of the Founders Award to former Gov. Carl Sanders, whose leadership and support resulted in the passage of legislation in 1963 to create the State Bar, culminating a 40-year unification effort by leaders of the Georgia Bar Association. I say thank you to Gov. Sanders for

his beneficial work that has borne such fruit over the last 50 years.

At this time, I would like to thank Director of Meetings Michelle Garner and her Administrative Assistant Gakii Kingoriah for putting together such a wonderful event and Sarah Coole and her staff for capturing it so well in the *Bar Journal* and for creating the Sanders video.

We also thank Gov. Nathan Deal for his keynote address, as well as Chief Justice Hugh Thompson, Chief Judge Herbert Phipps and U.S. Circuit Court Judge Beverly Martin, who provided their reflections on the relationship between the State Bar and the judiciary over the past 50 years. And thank you to everyone who attended and made the event such a success.

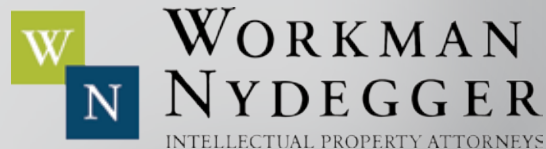
Also during the Midyear Meeting, we unveiled *From Banished to Unified*, our coffee-table sized historical account of the history of the legal profession in Georgia, from the early days when Gen. James Oglethorpe banned lawyers from the colony through the modern era of the unified State Bar. I want to thank Director of Communications Sarah Coole, Linton Johnson, Jennifer Mason and the communications team for their efforts to produce this book and have it ready in time for the 50th Anniversary Gala. I hope we can all agree that they produced a remarkable account of our history.

Constitutional Symposium

In March, we celebrated the 225th anniversary of the ratification of the U.S. Constitution by hosting a national symposium on the Constitution—bringing to Atlanta U.S. Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia and other great legal minds from across the nation, along with renowned historian and author David McCullough, for a fascinating discussion of the Constitution's role in shaping our society.

The three-day symposium was a complete “sell-out,” with 500+ registered participants in attendance. I want to thank the distinguished roster of more than 40 speakers, which included civil rights leader Dr. C.T. Vivian and former U.S. Solicitors General Paul Clement and Seth Waxman. Our hopes for this program to be a meaningful step toward fulfilling our duty to continue learning about and teaching others about the law and the fundamental principles on which it is based were definitely realized.

I also want to thank my symposium co-chairs—Justice David Nahmias of the Supreme Court of Georgia and Prof. David Oedel of the Walter F. George School of Law at Mercer University. Their extraordinary efforts were critical to the success of this national celebration as was the work of each chair for each segment of the program. I also want to thank Steve Harper and the staff of ICLE for their help in producing this program and for producing portions of the program for further CLE and civics education at the citizen, college, high school and middle school levels. If you want segments for local CLE or for local civic clubs or schools, please



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Robert Florence who will manage
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Shareholder **Robert Florence** is a registered patent attorney who focuses on complex pharmaceutical patent litigation brought under the Hatch-Waxman Act.

EDUCATION

J.D., University of New Hampshire, 2002
B.S., University of Utah, Biology, 1998
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call Steve at ICLE and he will be glad to help.

Also, we express appreciation to Gov. Deal and First Lady Sandra Deal for graciously hosting a reception for Justice Scalia at the Governor's Mansion as part of this event. And again, thank you to all who attended and participated in the symposium.

Civil Legal Services Task Force

Also this year, we appointed a Civil Legal Services Task Force to address the issues that have arisen from decreased funding for civil legal services.

Under the leadership of Co-Chairs Randy Evans and Rita Sheffey, the task force drafted proposed revisions to Bar Rule 1.15 and New Part XV, strengthening the requirements for IOLTA in an effort to increase available funding for civil legal services for low-income Georgians.

The task force also proposed to the Council of Superior Court Judges a modification to the *pro hac vice* rules to incorporate a \$75 per matter application fee, which would go to the General Counsel's office for administration and a \$200 annual renewal fee, which would go to the Georgia Bar Foundation. The task force also initiated talks with the Supreme Court and Court of Appeals about implementing a fee under the *pro hac vice* rules for all courts of record in the state. We are confident such fees will be imposed on out-of-state attorneys at each court level to generate substantial funds for legal services.

The task force also explored using excess county law library funds and encouraging trial judges statewide to consider legal services when disbursing *cy pres* awards, as well as proposing expense-side considerations for legal services.

We appreciate all of the hard work on the part of Randy, Rita and the entire task force on this important effort and also appreciate the support and encouragement

of Justices Thompson, Hunstein and Nahmias, and all members of the Supreme Court.

Military Legal Assistance

Next, I want to report on our Bar's Military Legal Assistance Program or MLAP. Thanks first to Jay Elmore, who traveled to the Middle East in 2007 on a Defense Department fact-finding mission and visited with our troops. He returned and talked to his partner, Jeff Bramlett, who was about to become Bar president. Because of their vision, and Norman Zoller's perseverance, our state has established the nation's model program for military legal assistance.

So what has MLAP done? Under leadership of the Bar's MLAP committee, previously chaired by Lynn Adam and Eric Ballinger, and now Eric himself—we have maintained a roster of more than 800 lawyers who have volunteered to provide legal help to our service members and veterans. Many of those lawyers are in this room, and I give you my personal thanks for your service.

Since our legal assistance program began in late 2009, we have now connected more than 1,200 service members or veterans with a lawyer. Also, several hundred cases have involved requests for assistance with VA benefit award matters resulting from service-connected illnesses or injuries. Of interest, when the MLAP first began there were 160 lawyers accredited to practice before

the VA. Through a series of CLE programs coordinated in part by our MLAP, Georgia now has 620 VA-accredited lawyers.

The program has also been actively engaged with other legal assistance programs, one coordinated by Cary King in creating memoranda of understanding and recruiting volunteer lawyers for the VA Medical Centers in Decatur and in Augusta, and also for separate VA clinics at Fort McPherson and at Carrollton. In collaboration with our Military/Veterans Law Section, and with Prof. Charles Shanor and Lane Dennard of King & Spalding, our MLAP also helped establish about a year ago a law school student clinic for veterans at Emory Law School. That program has achieved remarkable results that were reported in the February 2014 issue of the *Georgia Bar Journal*.

I cannot tell you how proud I am that this Bar created a program like our MLAP. In fact, staff at the American Bar Association in Chicago consider this to be one of the pre-eminent programs nationwide.

Legislative Program

On March 20, the Georgia General Assembly completed its 2014 legislative session. This was one of the most fast-paced sessions in history because of the earlier election cycle this year.

The State Bar worked with Gov. Deal and the General Assembly in support of what the Governor calls the "third leg" of criminal justice

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Practice Limited to Civil Matters



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reform—the re-entry of released offenders as productive and law-abiding members of society. To this end, the House and Senate overwhelmingly approved Senate Bill 365, to enact offender re-entry reforms as recommended by the Georgia Council on Criminal Justice Reform chaired by Judge Mike Boggs. I want to thank Judge Boggs and co-chair Thomas Worthy for their tireless work on this legislation.

We are also very pleased that the annual state budget approved for fiscal year 2015 includes an increase of \$386,000 dollars in funding for legal representation of domestic violence victims. The Appellate Resource Center was also funded in the new budget at the Bar's request.

It is also good to report that legislation to establish veterans' courts in Georgia was approved and signed into law, while a proposal that would have provided civil immunity to providers of legal self-help documents and services failed to pass after a hard won battle on the floor in which our Governmental Affairs operation was intimately involved.

The effectiveness of a legislative program was a prime motivating factor in the creation of the unified bar. The addition of Thomas Worthy, who came over from the governor's staff and serves as our full-time in-house director of governmental affairs, has greatly enhanced the efforts of our outstanding Advisory Committee on Legislation, chaired by Dan Snipes, and one of the strongest lobbying teams at the State Capitol, composed this past year of Rusty Sewell, Jim Collins, Meredith Weaver, Roy Robinson and Zach Johnson. I want to say thank you to Thomas and all of our legislative team for their efforts this year.

We are also grateful to our fellow Georgia lawyers who serve in the General Assembly—29 in the House of Representatives and 12 in the Senate. Their experience and expertise in the law has a positive impact on the legislative process, and we all appreciate the personal and professional sacrifices these lawyer-legislators make in order to run for office and spend a major part of each year at the Capitol. I would like to thank

each of them by name for their support of the Bar's legislative efforts (see list on page 33).

I thank all of you who have participated in our legislative grassroots outreach program in which meetings were held all over the state where lawyer constituents engaged with their legislators. Headed by Zach Johnson and Lester Tate, this effort has grown substantially and works to ensure that your representatives and senators hear from you on a regular basis regarding the issues affecting the legal profession and justice system. I urge you to keep up the good work because I can tell you it works!

Last, and this is not a political statement but is just fact, I want to emphasize that Gov. Deal, and his staff, supported every effort of the State Bar this year at the Capitol and elsewhere. Gov. Deal helped the State Bar on everything he was asked to do, and the fact is we could not have had a better friend this year than Gov. Nathan Deal.

Discipline

When the Bar was established, self-discipline was a primary motivating force behind unification of the Bar. I want to thank the chair of the Investigative Panel, Maria Waters, and the Investigative Panel, and the chair of the Review Panel, Tony Askew, and the Review Panel, and the disciplinary staff of the General Counsel's office for all their important, time consuming work on discipline. It is often unrequited, but I want everyone involved in that process to know how much we appreciate your hard work.

Executive Director

The successes of the events and programs I have talked about so far—along with other ongoing Bar initiatives too numerous to mention this morning—are all the result of months of planning and preparation by multiple people on multiple levels working as a team, that 45,000 member team I mentioned earlier. There simply is no room for "I" in the word teamwork.

But as any of my predecessors will tell you, we must also be ready to deal with the unexpected. Rest assured that I, personally, did not anticipate having to complete the second half of this Bar year without Cliff Brashier whispering in my ear about what a good idea something that had been proposed was or indirectly in Cliff's inimitable way indicating how dumb it was, or that I wouldn't get to listen to Cliff's jokes all year. That was something I really looked forward to.

We all lost a close friend and mentor in Cliff, who helped create a wonderful working environment for Bar leaders, members and staff. By greater measure than most people know, Cliff Brashier led the Bar with his advice and counsel and in so doing elevated its role as an effective organization representing the best interests of the justice system and the legal profession.

In fact, we have been able to successfully complete this year only because of the dedication and perseverance of the 88 members of this amazing Bar staff, who worked under and learned from Cliff and were therefore able to carry on the State Bar's legacy of service. As I asked them all in a staff meeting following his death, just keep calm and carry on. They did so with incredible finesse. I especially want to thank Chief Operating Officer Sharon Bryant, Chief Financial Officer Steve Laine and General Counsel Paula Frederick and administrative staff Dee Dee Worley and Pauline Childress for their support and leadership during this time.

While we will never be able to replace Cliff Brashier, the 34 different people on the Search Committee, Executive Committee, Bar staff and our search firm Heidrick & Struggles worked diligently for approximately four months to find the right person to succeed Cliff as our executive director. I hope and trust that you will all agree that the candidate found by the search committee and selected by the executive committee and by you—Jeff Davis—is that person.

2013-14 Georgia Lawyer-Legislators

House of Representatives

Rep. Stacey Abrams, House
Minority Leader
Rep. Stephen Allison
Rep. Alex Atwood
Rep. Johnnie Caldwell
Rep. Christian Coomer
Rep. Chuck Efstration
Rep. Stacey Evans
Rep. Barry Fleming
Rep. Rich Golick, chairman,
Judiciary Non-Civil
Rep. Dusty Hightower
Rep. Scott Holcomb
Rep. Mike Jacobs, chairman,
MARTOC
Rep. LaDawn Jones
Rep. Trey Kelley
Rep. Dar'shun Kendrick
Rep. Edward Lindsey
Rep. Ronnie Mabra
Rep. Larry O'Neal,
House Majority Leader
Rep. Mary Margaret Oliver
Rep. BJ Pak
Rep. Jay Powell, chairman,
Appropriations Subcommittee
on Public Safety
Rep. Regina Quick
Speaker David Ralston
Rep. Matt Ramsey,
House Majority Whip

Rep. Pam Stephenson
Rep. Brian Strickland
Rep. Andy Welch
Rep. Tom Weldon, chairman,
Juvenile Justice
Rep. Wendell Willard, chairman,
Judiciary
Bill Reilly, Clerk

Senate

Sen. Charlie Bethel
Sen. Jason Carter
Sen. Bill Cowser, chairman,
Higher Education
Sen. John Crosby, chairman,
Banking and Financial
Institutions
Sen. Judson Hill, chairman, Finance
Sen. William Ligon, chairman,
State and Local Governmental
Operations
Sen. Josh McKoon, chairman,
Judiciary
Sen. Ronald Ramsey, chairman,
Urban Affairs
Sen. Jesse Stone, chairman,
Judiciary Non-Civil
Sen. Curt Thompson, chairman,
Special Judiciary
Sen. Lindsey Tippins, chairman,
Education and Youth

Jeff brings a combination of leadership experience and work experience across our state that makes him eminently qualified to assume the position of executive director and provide superb advice and counsel to the Bar for many years to come.


Closing

As I conclude these remarks and close the book on the State Bar year for 2013-14, I want to thank each of you for your hard work as leaders of the State Bar of Georgia.

While this Bar year ends today, another one effectively starts tomorrow with the swearing-in of Patrise M. Perkins-Hooker as the 52nd president of the State Bar of Georgia. My final request to you is that you support Patrise in her efforts that benefit the Bar and work toward the goal of justice for all.

Thank you again for this tremendous privilege. But I thank you especially for your active service to the profession and for all that you do to serve your community, our state, our justice system and our fellow man. So what is the play now? I leave you with one of my favorite quotes: Micah 6:8—O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?

Sounds like a good plan to me.

May God bless you all. 



Charles L. Ruffin is the immediate past president of the State Bar of Georgia and can be reached at cruffin@bakerdonelson.com.