



Coming this Spring: Online Voting for State Bar Elections

At its meeting in October, the Alabama State Bar Board of Commissioners approved changes to the *Alabama State Bar Rules Governing Election and Selection of President-elect and Members of the Board of Commissioners* to permit online voting. A task force consisting of **Hamp Baxley** of Dothan, **Lee Copeland** of Montgomery, **Augusta Dowd** of Birmingham, **Joe Fawal** of Birmingham, and **Claude Hundley** of Huntsville studied the issue of online balloting for state bar elections. In its recommendation to the commissioners, the task force concluded that online voting would substantially reduce election costs and would likely result in a higher participation rate.

The task force considered several factors. First, better than 90 percent of the bar's members have access to the Internet. Next was the cost of printing and processing paper ballots. This past year, we did not have a contested race for president-elect and only five of 12 commissioners' races were contested, necessitating run-offs. For these contests, we incurred more than \$15,000 to print and mail paper ballots. This figure does not include staff time processing the paper ballots for the election certification committee. With a mailout to the entire bar membership (more than 16,000) in a president-elect race, our election costs would easily swell to \$25,000 or more. Finally, fewer and fewer members are taking the time to vote with paper ballots. Thus, our participation level averages in the mid-30 percent. The task force observed that since the Birmingham Bar Association adopted online voting a couple of years ago, it has experienced a significant increase in the number of their members casting ballots in those elections.

Under the revised election rules, qualifications and deadlines for nominations, as well as the rules governing campaign conduct, will not change. Nominating petitions, however, for both president-elect and commissioners may now be transmitted electronically. Under the new rules, members in good standing will be notified after May 1st each year by e-mail with a link to the bar's Web site that includes an electronic ballot. The online balloting system will authenticate the voting member and prevent the casting of multiple ballots while preserving the voting member's anonymity. The deadlines for casting ballots have been shortened for both regular and



KEITH B. NORMAN

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Continued from page 409

run-off elections. In both president-elect and commissioners' races, the initial ballot must be cast by the last Friday in May and the run-off ballot, if necessary, must be cast by the third Friday in June.

The task force made sure to include in its recommendations, which the commissioners adopted, a procedure for ensuring that bar members in good standing without access to the Internet are permitted to cast a ballot in president-elect and commissioners' races. When elections are announced in *The Alabama Lawyer* or members receive written notification of commissioner vacancies, a member can simply write the bar stating his/her lack of Internet access and request a paper ballot. The request will be good for all elections (president-elect and commissioners') during that election cycle.

Online balloting for Alabama State Bar elections will save thousands of dollars each year and considerably

streamline our election process. Members will now have a more convenient way to cast their ballots and those who lack Internet access will still be able to exercise their franchise in bar elections. The bar's elections rules are viewable on the bar's Web site, http://www.alabar.org/members/election_rules.pdf. I hope that you will take time to review these new changes. ▲▼▲

Education Debt Update

Nearly 60 percent of the applicants for the July bar exam had outstanding education loans. These loans averaged \$84,000. The average debt based on the law school attended was: Alabama, \$47,247; Birmingham, \$32,571; Cumberland, \$100,455; Jones, \$81,214; Miles, \$26,333; and out-of-state, \$96,457.

Check your December calendar, mark the date & plan to attend



CUMBERLAND
SCHOOL OF LAW
SAMFORD UNIVERSITY

- December 4** 16th Annual Employment Law Update, Birmingham
- December 11** Recent Developments, Montgomery
Choose live seminar or a 3 hour live webcast
- December 18** Negotiation Strategies in a Tough Economy
featuring Martin Latz, national negotiation expert, Birmingham
- December 29** 14th Annual CLE by the Hour, Birmingham
One day only!

Email
lawcle@samford.edu
for more information.
Look for the program
brochure six weeks prior
to the seminar.

Check our website at <http://cumberland.samford.edu/cle> for additional seminar listings or call (205) 726-2391 or 1-800-888-7454.

Did you know Cumberland offers a wide range of online courses?
go to <http://cumberland.samford.edu/cle>, click "online courses"

Samford University is an Equal Opportunity Educational Institution/Employer.