



By William N. Clark



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It is a very distinct honor to follow in the footsteps of such a truly outstanding lawyer and leader as **Fred Gray**. Frankly, I did not really know Fred, nor did I know of his very significant contributions to our state and the nation prior to becoming president-elect. If you have not read Fred's book, *Bus Ride To Justice*, I urge you to do so. It is a history of the civil rights movement in Alabama, in which he played a very key role.

Fred Gray's significance is not in the past, however. He served as a fine leader as the 126th president of the Alabama State Bar. I intend to ask the Board of Bar Commissioners to adopt Fred Gray's theme, **Lawyers Render Service**, as the permanent motto of the ASB. It is an excellent description of what we do in rendering service to our clients, to the profession and to the public. It would be a fitting tribute to Fred Gray.

In my remarks in Mobile upon taking over as president, I commented that many people had reminded me that Fred was the first African-American president of the ASB, and that I would really not be the first "anything" of the state bar. After reflecting on that thought, I realized that I am, in fact, a first, the first Caucasian to follow an African-American as president of the Alabama State Bar. I hope there are many other opportunities for such successions to occur in the future, or perhaps for a woman to follow a male president.

One of my principal interests in serving as president of the ASB is to carry out that portion of our **Mission Statement** which calls for us to improve the administration of justice and increase the understanding of the public about the law. As a unified or mandatory bar, the Alabama State Bar is a quasi-state agency. We

have been given the power to be responsible for the admission of lawyers, the discipline of lawyers and the administration of their continuing legal education obligations. These regulatory functions comprise a great deal of time by the bar's full-time staff, as well as many, many hours of members' time, e.g. writing the bar exams, grading exams, serving on disciplinary panels, serving on character and fitness committees, dealing with admissions, and handling other related tasks. These are essential day-to-day, year-after-year tasks. However, in carrying out that portion of the Mission Statement, we have significant latitude. We can do little or we can do much. I hope this year we can take a sincere interest in rendering service by striving to improve the administration of justice, and to increase the public's understanding of the law.

During Fred's term, with his endorsement, I was able to begin planning for this year. We held a leadership conference to which all of the leaders of the sections, specialty bars and local bar associations were invited. We also began planning for an **Indigent Defense Symposium**, to be held after the first of the year, focusing on the most pressing needs of our indigent defense system. Last year was the 40th anniversary of the United States Supreme Court decision *Gideon v. Wainwright*, which virtually extended the right to counsel in all cases. A book was written about that case entitled *Gideon's Trumpet*. Some have questioned whether 40 years later Gideon's call has waned.

Prior to the annual meeting, we began preparing a draft of a brochure to provide objective information about Governor Riley's tax plan. The brochure, "**The Alabama Tax Reform Decision**," was completed the

week after the annual meeting and has been distributed to bar commissioners for their use in making it available to lawyers and to the public in general in their communities, as well as to other individuals and groups throughout the state. Whatever position one may take on Governor Riley's plan, it is difficult to dispute that something must be done.

Some of our sections expressed an interest in having the state bar assume more responsibility for their administration. Consequently, I have created a task force to be chaired by **Bobby Segall** to look at the structure and governance of our sections. The task force will be made up of section chairs or their representatives. In addition, we will explore the possibility of instituting a **leadership development program** within the state bar to try and bring in bright young lawyers to get them interested in the bar by helping them to understand early on what it does and might do. The program would be modeled after such programs as "Leadership Birmingham," or "Leadership Alabama." **Pat Graves** of Huntsville has volunteered to lead that effort.

Our new **Quality of Life Committee** will also be looking into establishing a program to assist our new graduates with their **law school loan obligations**. These obligations, in many cases, are almost overwhelming. The ABA has developed a model program which our task force will be reviewing.

We also hope to develop other brochures to educate the people of Alabama about such critical issues as the reform of the **Alabama Constitution**, the **moratorium on the death penalty** as suggested by the ABA, and **judicial selection**. Several years ago, during **Warren Lightfoot's** term as ASB president, the Board of Bar Commissioners approved a resolution encouraging the adoption of **merit selection of judges**. I hope we can provide information to the public to aid them in understanding these critical areas.

We have also formed a new **Community Education Committee** to work with the **Center for Law and Public Education** to increase the understanding of the law by our state's children and young people. It also will be working with our **Public Relations Committee** on a new project entitled **Academics, Athletes and the Law**. This program will identify Alabama lawyers who are former college football players initially, and later other college athletes. We hope to have several television spots this fall in which lawyer/athletes encourage high school students to recognize how very few high school football players go on to play in college, and how many fewer make it to the pro ranks. We hope to encourage these young student athletes to understand the importance of getting a good education and the requirements for admission to college, and to think seriously about their future, particularly about becoming lawyers. We plan to have these lawyers go into the schools to talk about these topics. If you meet the requirements, please give **Susan Andres** a call at the ASB, **(334) 269-1515, ext. 132**. We are interested in your thoughts and participation.

Finally, many of our Alabama lawyers are serving or have served on active military duty during the past two years. On behalf of all the lawyers in the state, I thank you for your service and commend you for your dedication to our nation. **You are truly "twice the citizen."**

If you have ideas or suggestions about the operation of the state bar or its programs, things you would like to see accomplished, speakers for our annual meeting in July 2004 in Sandestin or anything else, feel free to give me or a member of the bar staff a call, (334) 269-1515. We have the finest staff in the United States. I assure you they will be responsive.

Thank you very much for this opportunity, and I am ready to serve. ■

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