

Swearing-in Speech
Sheldon H. Sloan
President, State Bar of California
Oct. 7, 2006
Monterey, CA

Mr. Chief Justice, Distinguished Members of the Bench and the Bar, My Family, My Friends and My Colleagues:

I am honored to have been elected President of the largest and most important State Bar in this nation. I am truly humbled. I have taken an oath this morning with knowledge of the burdens and responsibilities that it entails. I expect to devote whatever time and energy is necessary to obtain the best results for the membership of the State Bar for our courts, led by our energetic and wise Chief Justice, and the people of the State of California.

Having served as the President of the Los Angeles Bar Association in the past, I know from experience that I cannot do this by myself. I am acutely aware that any success that may be achieved will be a shared one. I plan to ask each member of the staff, and each member of the Board of Governors, as well as all other leaders of the Bar and Bench to join with me in working to achieve our goals. I will ask each of them to make a strong contribution and a commitment to help have a successful year.

By the way, you all know the difference between a contribution and a commitment, don't you? Well, suppose you had ham and eggs this morning for breakfast; you see, the chicken made a contribution, but the pig, well, he really made a commitment. So, I will be asking for commitments, not contributions.

Before I speak of specific leadership assignments, let me introduce Shelby Jean, my wonderful and supportive wife. We have been blessed to have four wonderful children and nine grandchildren to brighten and enliven our home. Fortunately, they all have extraordinarily busy and productive lives and families of their own. All are busy today with some form of football, basketball, riding or soccer games, and in return for them allowing me to accept this position, I have given them all a pass for today.

However, here today is the person who has known me the longest, my sister, Roberta Lester and her husband, Wesley, and my nieces, Barbara Silverstone, a member of our Bar Association, and Susan Wallace, M.D.

I wish to acknowledge the remarkable staff of the State Bar and thank them for their hard work in assisting the Board of Governors. This group of dedicated individuals, led by Judy Johnson and her senior staff of Bob Hawley and Starr Babcock, work hard and diligently. Their dedication makes California a better place for lawyers and their clients.

I want to acknowledge and thank the members of the Board of Governors, especially my classmates, the group of governors that is retiring after their third year of service: Ray Aragon, Rick Crabtree, Paul Hokokian and Demetrius Shelton, and two public members whose terms are expiring this year, Mel Lee and Tom Haider, M.D. Each of these governors has been hard working and dedicated to serving the membership and the public. Thank you all for your service; I will miss working with you.

Of course, none of this would be possible without the support of my long time associate, Diane Leckner, and the support of my firm, Lewis, Brisbois, Bisgaard & Smith, LLP.

Two years ago, President John Van de Kamp spoke of “pipeline” issues. This last year, under President Jim Heiting’s guidance, we developed a set of programs for approaching young people and getting them involved in the law. These programs are designed at their core to give hope to the economically disadvantaged young people in pursuit of a career in the law, and to encourage those already in the law to become involved in the State Bar.

Under the astute and demanding leadership of Dean Ruthe Ashley of McGeorge School of Law, a task force has been evaluating the various plans and programs that are currently in existence and improving and focusing those programs and other ideas to formulate a model program for us, encouraging “diversity from the ground up.”

We have made a great amount of progress this year, and now have a pretty good model pipeline program in place. But, the work is not yet completed. We must continue to hone and improve these programs. We are creating a set of model programs that can be accessed and used by any bar in the nation; and, these programs will be – we are all sure of that. To be certain, this project will not expire with a task force. We will move it into the mainstream and it will become a permanent part of our programs, under the Stakeholders Committee, which will be chaired this year by Vice President Ashley.

We are involved in many long-term efforts to better serve our members. We are looking at new programs, products, ideas and services to make available to the membership to make your jobs easier and your lives better. We are continuing to evaluate and critique our own management and performance of non-dues income, our budget, our spending, and our use of your funds. We have put in place performance measures and action plans to assist us in our evaluations and our planning; and we are diligently developing new non-dues revenue sources and improving old ones, in order to maintain and increase our services without increasing dues. We are looking into insurance products, making our real estate holdings more efficient, and examining a long list of goods and services to be made available with cost savings and/or increased benefit for our members.

This year, the primary effort has been led by Starr Babcock and his hard working staff, and he will continue in that role. The Membership Oversight Committee under which this program will function will be led by Vice President Marguerite Downing, a Senior Deputy Public Defender in Los Angeles County.

We also ask of our members that they afford each other, the courts and the public simple civil courtesy and behave as lawyers should be expected to behave. We will create our own code of professionalism and civility and seek to have all lawyers, firms and public offices up and down the State of California sign on to abide by these common courtesy rules. And, while we are at it, we will seek to have the same folks sign our already developed Diversity Pledge and Pro Bono Pledge as well. Marguerite clearly has her work cut out for her.

The appointments process is one of the most important and significant powers that we exercise on the Board of Governors. While it might appear that the President makes all appointments, let me hasten to tell you that it just isn't so. Our President is simply the Chair of the Board of Governors, and the appointments to all the significant commissions, from the Judicial Council, to Judicial Nominees Evaluation Commission, to the Committee of Bar Examiners and including all the Chairs and Vice Chairs of the Sections, all originate in the Volunteer Involvement Committee. That includes selecting the leadership for the coming year from applying members of the Committees, Commissions, Sections, etc.

This year VIC (as it is known) will be led by Vice President Jo-Ann Grace, who in her "spare time" is the Co-Publisher of the widely read Metropolitan News and all of its affiliated publications. Jo-Ann has an acute sense of purpose, and I assure you that this committee will carry a lot of weight when the Board sits down to approve their recommendations.

Regulation, Admission and Discipline is a very large part of what we do each year. In fact, the budget for Discipline alone runs in the neighborhood of about \$50 million a year. That is a very expensive neighborhood, indeed. With our recommendation of permanent disbarment on the agenda for this year, along with many other challenges to keeping the public protected while being fair to our members and to the applicants who seek to join the State Bar, the Chair of the committee, known as "RAD" has a huge responsibility.

This year, the "RAD" Committee will be led by Vice President Jim Scharf of San Jose. Jim is a partner in an in-house legal operation and an active trial lawyer. Jim is up to the task, and our Chief Trial Counsel, Scott Drexel, is fortunate to have Jim to work with next year, and, vice-versa.

A lot of what we do takes meticulous planning, and our finances require constant oversight. These responsibilities fall within the committee for Planning, Program Development and Budget. It is so important to be sure that we are always headed in the right direction, that we take three days during the year out of our lives and all attend a planning retreat.

This year the Planning, Program Development and Budget Committee will be led by Vice president Jeffrey Bleich of San Francisco, who is a partner in the prestigious law firm of Munger, Tolles, & Olson. One of the things we'll have to plan for is our next years' budgets, and Jeff will be a valuable ally in helping convince the members of the Legislature and the Governor of our real need for a two-year dues bill to aid us in properly planning for the coming years.

Are you still with me here? If you are, and you are related to a member of the Board of Governors, please pay close attention now. And, if you contemplate business with the Board in the coming year, you should pay attention as well. Tomorrow, I will ask the Board to approve a change in our meeting dates and times. We will vote on a proposal to start meetings on Thursday at 11 a.m. for committees, and the board meetings, formerly held on Saturdays, to commence Friday at noon and end by 4 p.m. Friday afternoons. This is in response to requests by those who would like to spend a little more time on weekends with their families.

Before I close, I wish to acknowledge our President Jim Heiting, who has served with great distinction over this past year. Jim has furthered many projects, but will always be remembered for his overwhelming support for the Pipeline Task Force, which allowed it to advance so far, so quickly. He is hard working and hard driving, diligent and persistent and has become a good friend of mine over the past three years.

I thank you, Jim, for your serious commitment; all the way to not having enough time to defend your world title Tennessee Walker Championship properly. No mind, you'll get it back next year and your golf game as well.

I am a person to whom much has been given. I was privileged to work in Washington, D.C., for the Justice Department led by Robert F. Kennedy during an era sometimes known as "Camelot."

I enjoyed a wonderful career as a trial lawyer and was appointed to the bench at a young age by then Governor Reagan (where I served with my good friend, Ron George, who I must now address as "Mr. Chief Justice" in public).

I then had a second career in the law; my practice as a real estate lawyer, and then a third as a Governmental Advocate, something I greatly enjoy to this day.

I have been lucky enough to lead some outstanding institutions: The Coro Foundation of Southern California, The Guardians of the Jewish Home for the Aging, The Los Angeles County Music and Performing Arts Commission, The Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum Commission, and the Los Angeles County Bar Association.

I have been able to make a contribution to our bench, both state and federal, by being a member of, and chairing several committees that made

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important recommendations to the appointing authorities. My cup truly runneth over.

Now, as I undertake perhaps the last, and arguably the most important assignment of my career, I ask God's support and blessing that I may have the wisdom and energy to do the best job possible for the people of the State of California and the members of the State Bar of California.

Thank you all for the opportunity and for being here today.