

## Education, Democracy and an Informed Citizenry



I begin this President's Message having recently returned from our Annual Meeting, a week filled with educational programs sponsored by our committees and sections, the Presidential Summit on educating tomorrow's lawyers and supporting today's lawyers, meetings of our Executive Committee and House of Delegates, and various breakfasts, lunches and dinners, many of which featured the presentation of awards to lawyers and judges from across the State recognizing their contributions to the Association, the profession and the public. I extend my thanks to all of our members and staff who worked so hard to make our Annual Meeting a great success.

In February, I traveled to ABA headquarters in Chicago to participate on a plenary session panel of the National Conference of Bar Presidents. Titled *Legal Education Reform Update: Frontline Leaders Share Perspectives on the Road Ahead*, this program provided an opportunity for us to share with bar leaders from across the country what our Association has been doing to educate lawyers about the challenges and changes in legal education, to distribute the September 2013 issue of our *Journal* as a resource for them, and to provide a model for possible actions

they might take in their states. I am pleased that the New York State Bar Association is recognized as a leader on an issue that is so important to the future of our profession. Again, I thank our Committee on Legal Education and Admission to the Bar, co-chaired by Eileen Millett and Ian Weinstein, for their tireless efforts.

It is not too early to be thinking about Law Day. The American Bar Association Division for Public Education has established as the theme for Law Day 2014 *American Democracy and the Rule of Law: Why Every Vote Matters*. In New York, Law Day is an opportunity to take up the call for all lawyers and judges across the State to be personally and actively engaged in civics education in their communities and schools and work to increase Americans' understanding of the role of fundamental principles in our constitutional democracy. This year's Law Day theme, emphasizing the importance of voting, is particularly timely for us in view of the report of our Special Committee on Voter Participation. This report, which was adopted by our House of Delegates last year, proposed a number of reforms at the state and federal levels to help increase voter participation. Since its adoption, we have carried our voting rights mes-

sage to our State Legislature and will continue to do so in 2014. We expect that voting rights will also be a subject when we attend ABA Day in April in Washington, D.C., in view of President Obama's State of the Union Address. In that address, he called for strengthening the Voting Rights Act, saying, "Citizenship means standing up for everyone's right to vote."

Civics education is another of the Association's key priorities. At its February 1, 2014 meeting, our House of Delegates unanimously approved the Report and Recommendations of the Law, Youth and Citizenship Committee, establishing NYSBA policy on civics education. The report, presented by Committee Chair Richard Bader and former Chief Judge Judith Kaye, noted the urgency of the issue, stating that "[p]reserving the fundamental civic mission of schools is vital to the continued success of American constitutional democracy." Please review the report, which is available at [www.nysba.org/LYCcivicsreport2014/](http://www.nysba.org/LYCcivicsreport2014/). We as an Association are committed to this effort, and I urge all lawyers and judges to join us. ■

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