



Are Lawyers Community Leaders?



There was a time in the not too distant past when lawyers would have been considered leaders in every town and city across the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Can the same be said today? While there is no end to lawyer jokes and seeming broad criticism of some areas of the practice of law, it seems to me that lawyers are still held in high regard in most parts of the state. Indeed, lawyers either hold or seek commanding roles throughout the state and nation. The president is a lawyer, the governor is a lawyer and in most parts of the country lawyers hold leadership positions in government, civic and cultural endeavors.

So what about the PBA? Are we a leader? Do we take charge and press forward on issues of importance to the commonwealth? After all, we have been designated by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court

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as the organization most representative of lawyers in the state.

There are frequent debates in both the PBA Board of Governors and House of Delegates about the extent of our role on issues of broad public concern that may not have a direct nexus to the profession. Last year, for example, the House hotly debated the role of the PBA in speaking out on educational funding disparities throughout the state. And the House determined that the issue was so fundamentally important that we could not ignore it.

At such times there are whispered fears of opening a Pandora's box, but fear may be the most paralyzing human response impeding growth and change. What if the bad guys win? But if they *are* the bad guys and we can once again show that they are, they *won't* win.

What about the deplorable state of government in Pennsylvania? Reform is so fundamentally important that we ought not to ignore it. There are likely no takers when it comes to believing that Pennsylvania government is functioning, efficient or effective. Most of us would say the opposite. Government in Pennsylvania needs to be re-examined and reworked, and the starting point for that is the state constitution.

As I write this, a special House of Delegates meeting on Oct. 19 is about to consider a resolution that will demonstrate our commitment to the rule of law and the role of the legal community as leaders. The resolution calls on the governor and the Legislature to create a Constitutional

Revision Commission to re-examine the constitution to determine whether it governs the commonwealth in a way that is best for its citizens. Perhaps it does and the fault is not with this document but with the way it is implemented. But the constitution, as Pennsylvania's operational directive, ought to be carefully looked at from a nonpartisan prospective. The Legislature demonstrated this past summer that they are paralyzed when it comes to good government. And they have also demonstrated they have no stomach when it comes to considering meaningful change to their own operations or the delivery of public education or reforming taxation or fairly apportioning legislative districts, to name a few hot-button issues.

The resolution is a clarion call for leadership on the part of the legal community to fix a broken government. The idea of change is not new. Over 60 calls for constitutional change have been made by individual representatives and congressmen. Some should be actively considered and some summarily dismissed. But something needs to be done.

If the debate is driven by fear, we will choose to do nothing. If we are willing to recognize fear for what it is and rise to the challenge of leadership, we can demonstrate how meaningful change can occur and undertake one of the most important things we can for our profession and our state. 🌟

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