

# We Must All Become Fair-Weather Friends by William P. Carlucci

Since May 1993, I have served in the PBA House of Delegates. Twice annually for many years now, I have attended long debates regarding the pros and cons of dozens of legislative proposals. Only recently have I come to understand that the PBA positions on those proposals are fairly meaningless unless the members of our Legislature choose to take them seriously.

In my role as chair of the PBA Political Action Committee board, I am responsible for working with our Legislative Department to inspire our members to greater interest in the political process. Much of the time, it is a hard sell. For many lawyers, the concept of political power is foreign to their nature.

Lawyers are trained to collect evidence, research the law and prepare an argument on the merits. Lawyers regard “currying favor” with decision-makers as at least unfair, if not flatly unethical. In short, most lawyers are ill-equipped for rough and tumble politics.

It was not always so. At the time that the Committee of Five submitted its draft of a Declaration of Independence to the Continental Congress, the Congress had 56 members. Nearly half of them were lawyers. Eleven years later, after the failure of the Articles of Confederation, the colonies sent 55 of their bravest and brightest citizens to a constitutional convention to form a new union. Of those, 31 were lawyers.

Since that time, the influence of lawyers in government has steadily declined. Today, only about 20 percent of the members of the Pennsylvania Legislature are lawyers.

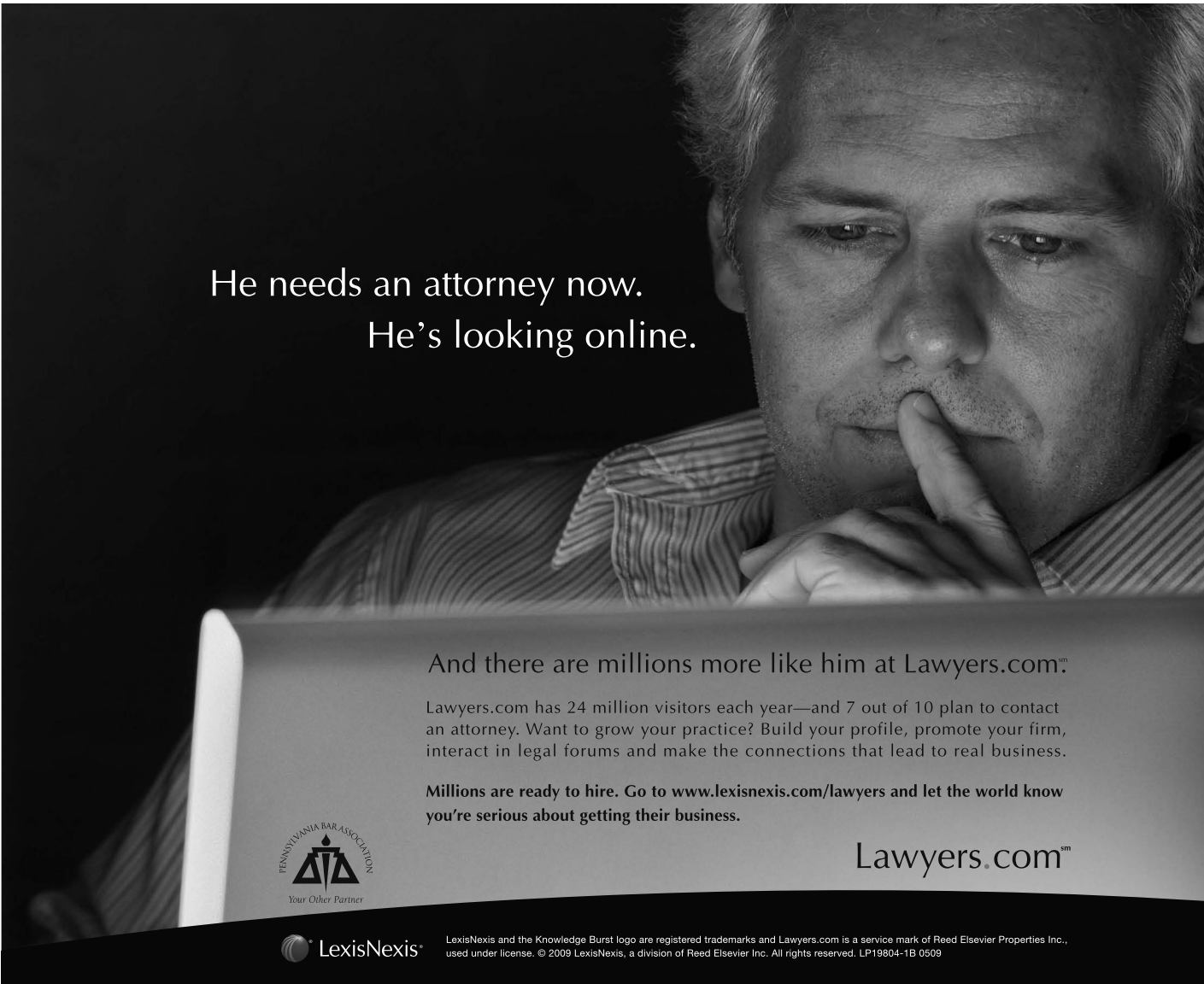
Three of those rare lawyer-legislators serve my native Lycoming County. I recently attended a fundraiser picnic for one of them. I arrived to find a large picnic pavilion teeming with supporters, including dozens of small-business owners and their spouses. I was shocked to realize that I was the only other lawyer. It is hard to understand why so many local business people easily realize the importance of supporting a local legislator (who happens to be a lawyer), while only one attorney in the entire county would

understand that as well. Naturally, everyone seeks to influence those in public office when the pressure is on. When the pressure is not on is the best time to establish and cultivate enduring friendships.

In the weeks and months ahead, the rule of law will come under attack in our commonwealth again and again. Proposals that are now pending in our Legislature to tax legal services, do away with advertising in local bar journals or transfer authority over lawyers from the courts to the Legislature will all come up for debate. During these times of “stormy weather,” lawyers will look to the PBA and its officers to protect the interests of lawyers and the clients we serve. Hopefully, when that day comes, it will not be too late.

“Saving for a rainy day” might sound like good advice, but it is lousy politics. Our association would be far better off if lawyers made friends in our Legislature during “sunny weather.” Now is the time to prepare for the dark days ahead. Now is the time to contact the PBA Legislative Department and volunteer to be a grassroots contact for one or more legislators. Now is the time to commit \$250, \$100 or even \$50 to the work of our PABAR-PAC. No vote is ever for sale, but the reasonable support of our friends helps them to remain in office.

Please do not wait to be asked. To learn more about the PBA network of grassroots legislative contacts, contact Legislative Coordinator Lauren Brinjac at (717) 238-6715, Ext. 2207, or [lauren.brinjac@pabar.org](mailto:lauren.brinjac@pabar.org). To support the work of the PABAR-PAC, please send your check to the PBA, 100 South Street, P.O. Box 186, Harrisburg, Pa. 17108-0186. You can also make credit card contributions on the PBA's website by clicking on the Legislative News section and selecting the PABAR-PAC menu option. Credit card contributions can be made on a one-time basis or in installments of \$25, \$50 or \$100 charged to your card each month. Remember, the contribution must be personal; it cannot come from a corporate account.



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