It is a great honor for me to carry on the long tradition of volunteer leadership of the Pennsylvania Bar Association. Immediate Past President Matt Creme did a masterful job, and his many strengths included his good judgment and patience and the admirable ability to stay calm and collected in any situation. It is my hope that I can serve as your president with the energy, commitment and thoughtfulness displayed by so many of my predecessors and colleagues.

It has been my pleasure to have devoted more than 25 years of active involvement in the PBA, starting out working in various committees and sections, which are the lifeblood of this association. That is a somewhat unusual first step toward leadership, but it has allowed me to understand what an amazing wealth of experience and expertise our members have in numerous practice areas and how we all benefit from the interaction among peers from across the state.

To me, PBA Committee/Section Days present wonderful opportunities to network with colleagues with similar interests who often have substantially more experience in the field and who are always willing to share their lessons learned.

Through the work of committees and sections, our members make a variety of recommendations for changes in bar policy, urge positions on pending legislation and rule changes, plan and present CLEs and focus on how we lawyers can excel in the practice of law while also protecting the core values of the profession.

In one of his “Side Bar” columns, Matt quite properly highlighted the important role and function of the House of Delegates in establishing official policy for the association. It is a truly deliberative body, and I can think of a number of memorable discussions and debates on controversial issues over the years.

Not every member may agree with every policy position. But all can be assured that key policies will be vetted by a well-regarded cross section of PBA leadership before they are adopted and pressed on Capitol Hill or before the Supreme Court.

Indeed, there is an opportunity for every PBA member to speak his or her mind. Let’s keep that tradition alive and support the results with our letters to and meetings with legislators and with the financial support of our political action committee, the PABAR-PAC. The PBA must have an effective voice not just in support of pending bills but also in opposition when, for example, misguided proposals would impose a tax on legal services or undermine the independence of our judiciary or the substantive rights of our clients.

As I begin my term, the PBA faces many of the same challenges faced by other voluntary state and local bars, including how to continue to develop and expand the scope of member benefits without placing undue upward pressure on dues. We must also continue our focus on getting the most out of the resources available to the Pennsylvania Bar Foundation, the PABAR-PAC and our Sustaining Fund for maintaining the PBA’s historic properties while developing non-dues revenue sources.

Another challenge the legal profession must continue to face is cuts in legal services funding. Lawyers have helped to fill this serious gap through pro bono service, and many of you have contributed your time and money to support legal services providers. I encourage all of you to do so, particularly in these strained economic times.

To spotlight some of your remarkable volunteer efforts, we have added a new monthly column to PBA publications called “Making a Difference.” This feature
It is important and timely that we have up-to-date, clear guidance for judges, lawyers and clients on how judges should, as appropriate, address and disclose substantial gifts, judicial campaign contributions from lawyers and litigants who appear before them and requests for recusal or disqualification due to the appearance of bias or impropriety.

In the year ahead we will also focus increased attention on youth and the law. On the PBA website we have established a resources page, www.pabar.org/public/committees/childavo/basedyoucourt.asp, dedicated to promoting youth courts as an adjunct to civics education. Youth courts encourage in-school and community problem solving for minor infractions, tend to reduce bullying and help to get kids on the right track before they find themselves in the juvenile justice system.

We will continue to stand behind the various juvenile justice system reforms approved and recommended by the PBA House of Delegates, some of which have been enacted by the Supreme Court and the Legislature.

It has been one of the great pleasures of my career to work with many of you and to see what great things our member-lawyers do for their clients on a daily basis across this Commonwealth. I look forward to visiting as many of you as possible at local bar events during the course of the year ahead. I pledge that in these difficult economic times PBA leadership will do its level best to ensure that the PBA maintains its reputation as an effective voice for the Pennsylvania legal profession.

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