

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Notes From the Road

BY RICHARD DREITZER, PRESIDENT,
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As I've touched on in previous columns, one area of focus during my year as state bar president has been to start a conversation around our great state on the issue of civility – not to mandate anything or pursue a particular agenda – but simply to listen to various perspectives and ask what the State Bar of Nevada can do to help. In that spirit, myself, State Bar Executive Director Kimberly Farmer and President-Elect Kari Stephens visited several locations in northern Nevada to open that dialogue and otherwise inquire as to what licensees need from their bar and how we might help them to get it.

I've always felt that among the many benefits of state bar service is the opportunity to meet people from across our great state – wonderful people that you might not otherwise have the chance to know. This trip was no exception. We met district court Judges Thomas Stockard and Michael Montero in Fallon (Tenth Judicial District) and Winnemucca (Sixth Judicial District) and were warmly received. Interestingly, on the issue of civility, Stockard and Montero echoed the point that instances of uncivil behavior are rare in their courtrooms. It seems that one of the advantages of rural practice is the mutual accountability that smaller bars tend to create.


It feels like the more likely it is that your conduct (whether positive or negative) will precede you, the greater likelihood that practitioners will take pains

to protect their reputations and practice with civility.

However, what was made clear to us is that the most pressing concern they face is the urgent need for new attorneys to practice in their jurisdictions – in both civil and criminal practice. They explained that their bars are aging and attorneys are leaving practice each year, without an influx of younger attorneys to maintain the needed numbers of practitioners. In addition, District Attorney and Public Defender offices often lack the staff to ensure that basic roles in the criminal justice system are filled, creating an emerging access to justice issue. These same sentiments were echoed in a later discussion we had with district court Judges Tod Young and Thomas Gregory in Minden (Ninth Judicial District), who were also quite gracious and generous with their time in speaking with us.

These staffing challenges also create tremendous opportunities for young attorneys to make their mark in communities that need them. I should add that each of these judges expressed their openness to meet with attorneys considering the benefits of rural practice. In fact, Young asked us to pass along an open invitation for a cup of coffee to practitioners making a trip to Minden. For our younger colleagues, there are chances for community connection and advancement in these jurisdictions that should not be missed.

In Reno, we had the pleasure of meeting with Chief Judge Lynne Jones (Second Judicial District) where she made it clear that civility issues, while



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not an everyday problem, certainly do arise in certain instances before her and her colleagues. What the chief judge explained is that she is successful in ensuring that civil discourse remains intact in her courtroom by being proactive and taking steps to “turn down the temperature” between counsel at the first sign of discourteousness. Jones then shared her various approaches to dealing with counsel and litigants and de-escalating situations where uncivil behavior appears imminent. Her comments were quite insightful.

Finally, we met with another practitioner on the “front lines” regarding issues of civility – Washoe County Public Defender Evelyn Grosenick. She explained that, as a manager of literally dozens of attorneys, her lawyers maintain solid working relationships with their

District Attorney counterparts. She also added that, in certain instances, acts of incivility are often a matter of perception. Thus, Grosenick often works to sort through comments made to those in her office in order to separate professional feedback from a potentially off-putting manner or style in which that feedback has been conveyed. Grosenick’s comments were quite thoughtful, and we enjoyed the chance to speak with her.

One theme arising from all our conversations is the appreciation for the state bar’s efforts to keep civility on the minds of Nevada’s attorneys and judiciary. Ensuring civil discourse is less about mandates and rule-setting than it is about being diligent in simply reminding each other of our shared aspirations for our profession. It’s like the air we breathe – we take for granted that it’s always there, but when

threatened, it takes precedence over just about everything else.

One final stop for this trip led us to the swearing-in ceremonies in Carson City and Las Vegas, for all new admittees who passed the July 2024 Bar Exam. These events were inspiring for all of us. As someone who’s practiced for a long while, it was wonderful to speak with and meet Nevada’s newest attorneys and those whose love and support got them to these special events.

So, I’ll leave you all with this thought ... If you need to reset or recharge your enthusiasm for legal practice and could stand a reminder of why our profession is so special, I strongly recommend you attend one of these ceremonies in 2025. The sense of accomplishment and pride of these new admittees will undoubtedly affect you as it did us. Happy holidays to all, and all the best for 2025!



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