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LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

Like many in North Dakota, I love the arrival of fall but dread the first snowfall, which means that, starting in mid-October, I never miss the evening weather report, with one eye on the weather radar and the other on the three-day forecast. Fortunately, we have enjoyed an extended fall this year (and no snow), which has provided me with extra opportunities for jogging around the golf course, catching my limits of walleye, and pheasant hunting with our two labs, Jackson and Charlie.

Fall has also always meant an opportunity to make a fresh start, whether it was moving on to the next grade with a new school wardrobe, clean desk, and fresh notebooks, or moving on to a new job after completing college or law school or the bar exam. With July bar exams now completed and graded, fall is a time for bar examiners, bar administrators, and NCBE to move on and reflect on our roles and future challenges.

My yearlong term as NCBE chair began in earnest this October when the Board of Trustees held its first quarterly meeting in Nantucket, Massachusetts. Luckily, this was a week before the first winter storm in the Northeast, which as I write this still has areas of Connecticut without power. In Nantucket, chair-elect Franklin Harrison and I hosted a one-day retreat attended by current and former Board members and key NCBE management staff. After a brief summary of the history and formation of NCBE, we focused our discussion on the value of the organization, the roles of its Board and committees, and the future challenges facing NCBE, including its function in meeting the current and future needs of jurisdictions.

What became apparent is that NCBE as an organization has significantly changed since it was formed in 1931. It is now a professionally run and professionally staffed corporation, with staff devoted to the business of test development and test administration. These changes require the Board and its committees to take on different roles than in bygone years, when much of NCBE's work was performed by volunteer bar examiners and administrators.

The retreat met all of my expectations. I was very pleased with the sincerity and seriousness of our discussions. While no decisions were made, we reached a consensus that Board agendas need to be more focused on strategic issues, framed by the reports and advice of Erica Moeser and her professional management team. This reframing may also result in refocusing our committees so that time volunteered by committee members is conserved for significant input on major issues.



The other NCBE meetings I attended this fall have also focused on important issues facing NCBE and the bar examining community. On October 2 and 3, I attended the Academic Support Conference in Madison, during which NCBE staff and committee chairs described the development and scoring of the bar exam. The participants gave the program very high marks and particularly enjoyed the interaction with one another as academic support professionals and with the “bar experts” available at the program. As one participant commented, this training “gives me such credibility with my students and some of my faculty.”

In early November, I attended another meeting in Madison about adding the subject of Federal Civil Procedure to the Multistate Bar Examination. This meeting, attended by Civil Procedure experts, included a discussion of content specifications and a drafting exercise in which the participants drafted potential multiple-choice questions based on a content outline. While none of the questions were ready for prime time, the exercise demonstrated that the subject of Federal Civil Procedure could be tested in a multiple-choice format. By the close of the meet-

ing, all participants agreed that it was a fruitful day and that the project should move forward.

My final event of the season was the CBAA Fall Meeting in Providence, Rhode Island. Again, as expected, the program was sensational. Topics included incorporating the study of professionalism and ethics into law school curricula, investigating the character and fitness of foreign attorneys, and conditional admission and licensing of sex offenders. What I found to be even more enjoyable was the esprit de corps of the attendees. The participants were genuinely having fun while at the same time totally engaged in recognizing and meeting the challenges facing bar administrators. Based on our retreat discussions in Nantucket, the NCBE Board of Trustees also models this “can-do” spirit.

I wish you all a mild, fall-like winter and a Happy New Year. Please don’t forget to put Savannah, Georgia, on your calendars for NCBE’s Annual Bar Admissions Conference on April 19–22, 2012. Spring will have arrived by then, at least in Georgia. 📅

Best regards to all.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rebecca S. Thiem". The signature is written in dark ink on a white background.

Rebecca S. Thiem