

legal beat

By Julie Reynolds and Kathryn Alfisi

News and Notes on the D.C. Bar Legal Community

Senator Landrieu Keynotes Judicial & Bar Conference

Lawmakers and government officials joined judges and legal practitioners on March 30-31 for the third biennial meeting of the D.C. Bar and the District of Columbia courts. The 2006 Judicial & Bar Conference featured plenary programming, seminars, award presentations, and a judicial reception.

Taking up the theme of the conference, "State of Emergency: Is the District's Justice System Prepared?" was the keynote speaker, Louisiana Senator Mary Landrieu, who spoke about the devastation of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast in the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005.

Landrieu detailed the human cost and the billions of dollars required to restore New Orleans alone. When the levees broke, the city was inundated with 10 to 15 feet of water from Lake Pontchartrain, forcing the evacuation of 1.2 million people within 24 hours. Some 180,000 homes were lost. "Whole families floated away with them," she said.

There *was* a plan in place for dealing with this catastrophe, Landrieu emphasized, but technical problems prevented implementation. Foremost among these obstacles was the absence of an effective communications system connecting first responders with one another and other government personnel. That inability to communicate, to receive and transmit accurate information, made rescue and relief efforts far more difficult than they should have been.

The United States ought to be able to handle such catastrophes, she said. She called on the nation's leaders to think about the risks of not being prepared and repairing the damage that occurred.

Before the keynote address, Stuart Schiffer, deputy assistant attorney gen-

eral at the U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Division, received the 2006 Beatrice Rosenberg Award for Excellence in Government Service from D.C. Bar President John Cruden.

Following the luncheon, the conference featured 10 seminars on a variety of topics.

One seminar focused on the Domestic Violence Unit of the D.C. Superior Court, now in its 10th year. Professor Laurie Kohn, codirector of the Domestic Violence Clinic at Georgetown University Law Center (GULC), moderated the event and introduced fellow panelists, including the clinic's other codirector, GULC associate dean Deborah Epstein, who gave an introduction on the unit and how it functions. D.C. Superior Court judges Stephen G. Milliken and

William M. Jackson discussed some of the unit's continuing problems and how best to deal with them. Kimberly Knowles, deputy chief of the Sex Offense/Domestic Violence Section of the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Columbia, gave participants the prosecution perspective. Arthur Ago of the D.C. Public Defender Service offered the defense viewpoint.

A lively discussion followed the panel presentation, particularly on the issue of perceived unfairness toward defendants in domestic violence cases. The issue concerned all sides, as a person believing that he or she has been treated unfairly is more likely to act out against whoever put him or her in that position.

Conference programming also featured a forum on the District of Columbia Access to Justice Commission, which was created last year by the D.C. Court of Appeals to address the unmet legal service needs of low- and moderate-income residents. Panelists talked about the commission's initiatives, successes, and future challenges.

Taking part in the panel discussion were commission members Peter Edelman, a professor at Georgetown Univer-

sity Law Center and commission chair; Judge Inez Smith Reid of the D.C. Court of Appeals; Patty Mullahy Fugere, executive director of the Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless; and Andrew Marks, a partner at Crowell & Moring LLP. The commission's executive director, Sunil Mansukhani, served as moderator.

Among the commission initiatives the panel discussed were strengthening the IOLTA program, improving language access, and procuring public funding for civil legal services. Recently, the commission requested the District government to provide \$6.2 million for civil legal services for fiscal year 2007.

The conference closed with a judicial reception honoring members of the local and federal judiciary who recently retired or have taken senior status. During the reception Edward Allen, professor of law at the University of the District of Columbia (UDC), received the D.C. Bar Foundation's Jerrold Scoult Prize, presented by Dean Shelley Broderick of the UDC David A. Clarke School of Law. —J.R., K.A.

Plenary Session Addresses Disaster Preparedness and Recovery

What would happen if Washington, D.C., were struck by a man-made or natural disaster? Would the legal community know how to respond, or how to recover?

This year's Judicial & Bar Conference addressed such questions with plenary sessions such as "Disaster and Recovery: Lessons Learned From Other Jurisdictions," held on March 30, which featured members of the legal profession who have had to face disasters in their own jurisdictions.

Judge Madeleine Landrieu of the Civil District Court, Division E, of the Parish of Orleans and Judge Ivan L. R. Lemelle of the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Louisiana shared their experiences dealing with the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Thomas Hall, the clerk of the Supreme



Photo by Julie Reynolds

Mary Landrieu