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2008-07-27 H. Thomas Wells, Jr. ABA Presidential Speech

H. Thomas Wells Jr.

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Good evening, and thanks Brett (Baber). It is a pleasure to join you for the 15th Annual Education Law Conference and for the 9th Wingspread Conference. Thank you, Sarah, for inviting me to be with you and to participate in the events.

Last fall, in October, I was invited to attend the Wingspread 8 conference. I learned so much about the innovative work of the Wingspread consortium. I was privileged to join the group and to learn about strategies to increase the

numbers of students of color in the educational pipeline to the professions.

What often strikes me about conferences such as these are the range of participants who come together because of their commitment to improving legal education in this country and who recognize the importance of diversity in legal education.

As the nation's minority population increases, the bar is failing to keep pace. Law school admissions for underrepresented minorities remain

flat or are in decline. More attention on collaborative intervention earlier in the pipeline, rather than just at the law school or bar exam gates is needed.

Now, more than ever, we need gatherings such as the Education Law and the Wingspread consortium conferences, where educators, law school deans, lawyers, policymakers, advocates and practitioners from a wide array of professional and educational settings come together to find common ground. Together, we can

find solutions to address the educational and diversity needs of the legal profession – two topics that are inextricably linked.

Diversity is one of the core values of the legal profession. Each time a gifted person of color faces systemic barriers to entering law school, passing the bar, and climbing the ranks of our profession it's not just a lack of opportunity for those talented individuals – it is a lost opportunity for all lawyers as we strive to serve a diverse society.

I'm proud to say that the ABA is striving to expand its commitment to increasing diversity in the legal profession. Within our Center for Racial and Ethnic Diversity, we have three entities whose work centers on this very topic.

One group – the ABA Presidential Advisory Council on Diversity – focuses exclusively on pipeline diversity, or as they say “from birth to bar passage.” For those of you who don't know, Ruthe Ashley (or the queen of pipeline) is the Advisory

Council's chair and with us this evening; and Sarah Redfield is also an invaluable member of the Advisory Council.

The Advisory Council serves as a think-tank, incubator, and encourager of pipeline diversity programs. It collaborates with a number of organizations and associations throughout the country – notably the Law School Admission Council, with which it is partnering of the Pipeline Diversity Directory.

The Directory is an online, searchable database of pipeline programs. I invite you to visit the directory, accessible through the ABA's Diversity Center website.

Also within the auspices of the Center is the Legal Opportunity Scholarship, which each year since 2001 has awarded 20 students of color with a five thousand dollar scholarship for each year of law school. The Legal Opportunity Scholarship committee has just completed selecting this year's

recipients – culled from some 900 applicants.

And of course, there is CLEO – the Council on Legal Education Opportunity. The ABA Fund for Justice and Education founded CLEO 40 years ago to expand opportunities for minority and low-income students to attend law school. Today, CLEO remains one of the most comprehensive resources for diverse students interested in law and for legal employers seeking the superb quality of CLEO alumni.

I share this information with you not to “toot our ABA horn,” but to extend our hand in collaboration to every person here. Again and again we hear the mantra of collaboration: without it, we will not succeed in our varied missions of education, diversity, and excellence in legal education.

This conference is a wonderful example of collaborative success and cross-pollination, drawing from ways to promote student aspirations and more personal success; balancing increased diversity with fair and equal

access to education; improving civics education in our schools; and media (both old and new) in learning environments and as important tools and systems for education.

I know you are all as excited as I am to be here. I look forward to learning from all of you over the coming days. Through partnerships, we broaden our reach and compound our outcomes. As we work together, and with other professions that value the educational pipeline, our efforts will equip more American students

**from every corner of our country to
better compete in a global society.
There is no better legacy.**

	Friday 7/25	Saturday 7/26	Sunday 7/27	Monday 7/28
7am			Wingspread Conference @ Portland, ME	
8am			DEPART: Depart Birmingham, AL on Delta #4386 @ Birmingham, AL to Cincinnati, OH 7:15am - 10:...	REMARKS: LRE Diversity Panel @ TIME and Location To Be Determined 8:30am - 10am
9am				
10am				
11am			DEPART: Depart Cincinnati, OH on Delta #5150 @ Cincinnati, OH to Portland, ME 10:50am - 1...	
12pm				
1pm				
2pm				
5pm				
6pm			Reception @ Location To Be Determined 6pm - 6:30pm	
7pm			REMARKS: Opening Dinner @ Location To Be Determined 6:30pm - 8:30pm	
8pm				

	Tuesday 7/29	Wednesday 7/30	Thursday 7/31	Friday 8/1
	<p>Wingspread Conference @ ...</p> <p>Chicago Trip @ Chicago, IL</p>			<p>ATTEND/REMARKS: National</p>
8am		<p>ATTEND: Breakfast Meeting @ Westin River North, Ember Grille, Lobby Level 7:30am - 9am</p>		
9am		<p>PARTICIPA... Media Tapings @ ABA Office of the President, 21st Floor 9am - 3pm</p>		
10am		<p>PARTICIPA... Executive Committee Conference Call @ Office of the Presi... 9am - 3pm</p>		
11am		<p>Bice conference call with Judge England 11am - 12pm</p>	<p>TENTATIVE: Media Briefing Conference Call @ Birmingham, AL 10:30am - 12pm</p>	
3pm				<p>FYI: Commission on World Justice Project Meeting @ Hilton New York, Concourse A, Concourse Level 3pm - 5pm</p>
4pm				
5pm	<p>DEPART: Depart Portland, ME on Northwest #3584 @ Portland, ME to Detroit, MI 4:22pm - 6:34pm</p>			
6pm				<p>REMARKS: NBA Dinner @ Westin Galleria Hotel, Room ???, Floor ??? 6pm - 10pm</p>
7pm				
8pm	<p>DEPART: Depart Detroit, MI on Northwest #3684 @ Detroit, MI to Chicago, IL 7:34pm - 7:48pm DEPART: De...</p>	<p>8:15pm - 9:55pm DEPART: De...</p>		