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H. Thomas Wells Jr.

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Recognize:

- * **Justice Benham (presenter and namesake of awards)**
- * **Chief Justice Sears**
- * **Jeff Bramlett (State Bar President)**
- * **Patrise Perkins-Hooker (chair of awards selection committee)**
- * **Award recipients (including, posthumously, Griffin Bell—an outstanding community servant whose legacy continues to illustrate the best of Atlanta's legal community)**
- * **Members of the bar and guests**

It's an honor to be here, especially as we celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Chief Justice's Commission on Professionalism. The American Bar Association is keenly aware that the commission is a national model for

**lawyer professionalism programs
across the country.**

**Community service—the reason
we're here this evening—is a crucial
aspect of lawyer professionalism.**

**Lawyers work to improve our
communities in countless ways:
serving on local councils and nonprofit
boards, donating our services as
teachers, mentors, and coaches, and
providing leadership and support to
civic, religious and philanthropic
organizations.**

The call to service has deep historical roots in the American legal profession. As early as 1835, Alexis de Tocqueville observed that lawyers "assume a responsibility for the common good through public life" and that they were particularly well suited to this role by their "training and cast of mind."

When Louis Brandeis gave his famous speech in 1905 on *The Opportunity in the Law* to the Harvard Ethical Society, he said that [quote]

"the paramount reason why the lawyer has played so large a part in our political life is that his training fits him especially to grapple with the questions which are presented in a democracy."

As our nation faces innumerable economic and social ills, it is lawyers who most naturally and frequently offer the talents, skills, and leadership necessary to strengthen our communities, improve the lives of our

**children and families, and help others
in need.**

**To understand the importance of
this, imagine a world without any
volunteers. Based on government and
academic research:**

*** Roughly 30% of hospital support
services would disappear;**

*** Virtually all places of worship
and the services they provide would
cease to exist;**

*** Roughly 60% of fire and
emergency services would disappear;**

*** After-school activities and tutoring programs would be drastically curtailed;**

*** And neighborhood nutrition programs, housing, and other social services for the underserved would diminish by roughly half.**

Our commitment to community service benefits not only those who receive the service, but also—quite frankly—the lawyers, legal employers, bar associations, and law schools that support these opportunities.

Studies have shown that volunteering has significant health benefits and contributes to higher occupational prestige.

By freeing up time for community service work, legal employers can improve job satisfaction and retention rates for the lawyers in whose recruitment and training they have made such a substantial investment.

Law firms can also build stronger relationships with their clients by collaborating on community service

projects of mutual interest. And they can enhance their reputation and prestige within their communities and the overall image of lawyers and the legal profession.

This evening's award recipients embody the best of our profession. Their actions remind me not only why I'm so proud to be a lawyer, but also why I so much enjoy representing our profession as ABA president.

It is the example our honorees set that illustrates something I always

**point out with lawyers, law students,
and community audiences:**

**At times we lawyers can be good at
making a dollar, but we're at our
dead-level best when we're making a
difference.**

**Thank you for making a huge
difference through community service.**