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2009-11-11 H. Thomas Wells, Jr. ABA Presidential Speech

H. Thomas Wells Jr.

University of Alabama School of Law

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BOB PARRISH - Duke

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FOR
LCA Diversity
Summit

- Diversity is a core value of the legal profession, one I've chosen to highlight during my presidency. Virtually every bar association focuses on diversity, and for good reason.
- The legal profession is where society looks for its leaders. If we don't match the diversity of our profession with that of our society, society will find its leaders elsewhere.
- Unfortunately, our profession has failed to keep pace with the rapid diversification surrounding us. Perhaps we have marched in place, but marching in place equates to falling behind.
- And let's not allow the advances we *have* made—and there have been many we can rightfully celebrate—to make us succumb to diversity fatigue. We're here to take a fresh look toward the future. We must stride forward, but first we must figure out how. That's why we're here.
- That is also why for more than 20 years, the ABA has been committed to the goal of diversity in the legal profession.

- WHEN WOMEN AND MEN OF DIVERSE BACKGROUNDS FACE SYSTEMIC BARRIERS TO ENTERING LS, MATRICULATING FROM LS, PASSING THE BAR + REISING IN THE PROF NOT A LACK FOR THEM LOST OPP FOR THE PROF.

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- **During those years, we have expanded our understanding of the nature of diversity and the challenges faced by a diverse membership.**
- **This has been reflected in the work of the ABA's Commission on Women in the Profession, the Center on Racial and Ethnic Diversity, the Commission on Mental and Physical Disability Law, and the Commission on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity.**
- **These and other ABA entities are committed to the Association's goals of "promoting full and equal participation in the association, our profession, and the justice system by all persons" and "eliminating bias in the legal profession and the justice system."**
- **During my year, ABA also hosted the National Presidential Diversity Summit in June, along with the regional hearings that preceded the summit.**
- **The intent of this diversity initiative was not simply to mirror what had been done or what is currently in process. Rather, our intent was to provide a platform for reflecting on how the face of diversity has changed, whether the promotion of diversity has**

been successful, how we can measure success, and what efforts will improve diversity in the future.

- **We shared a lot of good ideas at the Summit and hearings. And I am proud to say that the Summit was successful in facilitating an open and honest forum for the exchange of experiences and ideas – allowing the ABA to take stock, take pride, and take meaningful action.**
- **But though we've made progress over the years, the state of racial and ethnic diversity in our profession remains troubling. For example, America's general population is about 75 percent white, but the legal profession is nearly 90 percent white.**
- **An equally important priority is the status of women. Despite the achievements of many women lawyers, many others still face barriers, and the problems are exacerbated for women of color.**
- **People with disabilities and LGBT individuals also have their share of challenges in our profession and justice system.**
- **One thing that became clear during the Summit was that we must continue collaborating together. We**

don't necessarily need to reinvent the wheel, as there are many excellent programs out there to expand the pipeline to the profession, and mentoring programs to keep diverse lawyers in the profession.

WINGSREAD - pipeline to law
Cleveland Bar Assn