

Student Debt Relief HOPE APPEARS ON THE HORIZON

By Michael Pellicciotti

For the past decade, the American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division has advocated for student debt relief for new attorneys. Congress is now taking action.

Last May, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the Prosecutors and Defenders Incentive Act. It provides partial loan forgiveness for attorneys who commit to practicing criminal law through public service for at least three years. Prosecutors and public defenders are eligible for the program.

ABA Immediate Past President Karen Mathis said in a press release, "Under the current system, lawyers often are forced to leave such public service for higher paying positions in law firms or other venues, meaning that lawyers who do remain are stretched thin and must assume considerable case loads." She added that "[i]n addition to such strain on the individual lawyers and family, this threatens the administration of justice and the very fundamentals of our nation."

The bill now goes to the U.S. Senate, where Sen. Dick Durbin (D-IL) is sponsoring its companion bill. Both the House and Senate legislation allow eligible attorneys to receive up to \$10,000 per year for debt relief. The maximum total benefit is \$60,000, which is allocated on a first-come, first-served basis. The relief applies to all student federal loans.

The ABA YLD also supports other broader legislation being considered by Congress. Sen. Ted Kennedy (D-MA) is sponsoring the Student Debt Relief Act of 2007, which is currently in the



Health, Labor, Education, and Pensions Committee. This act would forgive the balance of loan debt for attorneys who practice in the public sector for ten years. It would establish a tax credit for student-loan interest payments and apply to many government workers, including nonlawyers. The bill defines public-sector attorneys broadly and includes those who practice in government and public-interest legal services.

When introducing the bill to the Senate earlier this year, Sen. Kennedy said, "It's obvious we need to act immediately to make both college costs and student debt more manageable—and that is what this bill is all about." "The Student Debt Relief Act will help lift the financial yoke that burdens our students and families as they try to pay for college," he said.

The loan-repayment bills passed and considered this year are not the first types of debt-relief legislation that the ABA has advocated for in Congress. In 2004, Congress created the first

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Is an Immigration Law Practice Right for You?

By Angela T. Drees

As this article was being written, the U.S. Senate rejected the latest attempt at immigration reform: Proposed Senate Bill S. 1639. Politicians and pundits dubbed the bill the "grand bargain," which generally focused on all aspects of immigration law, including family-based and employer-based visas, and policies and procedures for acquiring permanent residence status in the United States.

Immigration law is intimately tied to the global marketplace and ensures that workers are able to enter the United States so that our labor markets remain large, vibrant, and diverse. For example, the State of Alabama has been voted "State of the Year" by *Site Selection Magazine* for the past four years with respect to the amount of money invested and number of jobs created. The average unemployment rate in Alabama is around 4 percent, and nearly half of all of the investment indicated in the statistic was received by international sources with large, corresponding labor pools.

For young attorneys considering a career in immigration law, the United States' position in the global economy, its rich immigrant history, and current politics can contribute to an active immigration practice. U.S. citizens are divided on many issues surrounding immigration reform. As the U.S. economy changes and Congress continues to propose solutions to a very complex problem, immigration attorneys will be able to "reinvent" themselves every decade to keep up with legislation. With all of this in mind, a young and emerging practition-

er may find almost permanent job security in the area of immigration law.

The practice of immigration law requires thick-skinned practitioners who must regularly explain complex immigration visa law to American employers or families who may have never left the United States and who likely do not understand border patrol, penal mandates, political asylum, or family-based unity laws. A practitioner might be required to respond to those global company executives who question why U.S. immigration policy seems to ignore a changing world in terms of creating a diverse pool of new employees and promoting a new and creative workforce.

Technology has made immigration law practice not only easier but also fun. You can have a fully portable "virtual" office that you can access from anywhere in the world using remote-office software packages. This allows you to represent clients you may never meet face

to face. Your clients can access your virtual office remotely to check the status of their cases, thereby limiting the "What is going on in my case?" questions that require your time.

So if you are considering an immigration law practice, there is no time like the present to enter the immigration fray. Congress, media pundits, and even your friends and neighbors may find your practice fascinating, which can place you in demand at social functions. You could help integrate foreign workers into a juggernaut U.S. economy and educate your communities about important immigration issues. You could even end up being a hero when you successfully conclude your first political-asylum case by helping someone really in need.

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READY RESOURCES

- International Law 101: Immigration and Business Law at the YLD Fall Conference Fri., Oct. 5. Cosponsored by the Section of International Law. www.abanet.org/yld/fall07/schedule.shtml



Summer Associate Programs That Work

By Brooks R. Foland

The stated goal of most summer programs is to provide an opportunity for law students to experience the practice of law in the real world. But if all participants are being honest, then we must admit that the primary purpose for law firms is to conduct a ten-week interview. For that interview process to have a fighting chance, certain things must be expected of both summer associates and employing law firms.

Real exposure. Summer associates learn to practice law by real exposure to legal analysis, writing, and face-to-face, client-attorney interaction. To make the summer experience as realistic, educational, and meaningful as possible, management should encourage all attorneys to take summer associates to meetings, court appearances, and depositions. Newer associates who are

not far removed from the internship process can help identify unique and interesting legal events in support of this goal.

Mentor. Each summer associate should be assigned a mentor—or two. The general role of mentors is to discuss the types of work that the summer associates are interested in and, if possible, secure those particular types of assignments. All attorneys in the firms should give assignments, and summer associates should seek them, but the mentor should be a gatekeeper determining the assignments' appropriateness in subject matter, complexity, and duration. Mentors should also be able to answer any questions regarding firm procedure or philosophy and any other questions the summer associates may have regarding the practice of law. Choosing complementary

mentors from among the newer associates in the firm can help summer associates with questions they might not feel comfortable taking to a partner, which helps ease the social transition.

Feedback. Assigning lawyers have a duty to provide feedback and/or constructive criticism to summer associates after they complete a project. This is how they learn and how they develop the skills necessary to be accomplished practitioners! Returning marked-up writings with detailed explanations of changes or sitting down with the summer associate to review work provides great insight. In a perfect world, summer associates should seek out this feedback if it is not freely given. However, it can be daunting for summer associates to approach more experienced attorneys,

and this is where a new associate mentor can assist them.

Treat them like a lawyer. If your firm is going to pay the summer associates like lawyers, then treat them like lawyers in many other respects. If possible, give them an office for their stay and put their names on the door. One recent summer associate recalled that such "trivial things" made her feel like she belonged. Pair them with support staff, if possible, to help build professional relationships. Teach summer associates the importance and mechanics of billing and what is expected of young attorneys in those areas. When appropriate, invite them to participate in various marketing activities. Finally, your summer associates should be involved in pro bono work, community events, seminars, and writing for legal publications.

All work and no play. A summer program that includes a variety of cultural, social, and sporting events allows summer

associates to get to know the attorneys, clients, and fellow summer associates on both a professional and personal level. So take them to dinners, ball games, or even on the firm retreat. Encourage them to play on the firm's softball team or in golf outings and to attend firm events. These fun activities give summer associates the opportunity to become familiar with the communities in which we practice.

The life after. A successful summer program that afforded many valuable lessons and opportunities may not only lead to permanent employment for the summer associate, it will resonate throughout the early years of the associate's practice. Partners, associates, staff members, and summer associates all play a key role in the success of these programs.

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Flying Solo YOU DON'T HAVE TO DO IT ALONE

By Youshea A. Berry

Solo practice is not for the fainthearted and takes one-third legal expertise, one-third good business sense, and one-third gumption. Here are some tips and advice for those of you who want to blaze a trail:

Lesson #1: Get great mentors. Before I started my practice, I sought the counsel of women who I know to be exceptional lawyers. They candidly talked about their experiences in solo practice and the challenges of family-work-life balance. They taught me to enjoy the benefits of working for myself and to develop and maintain a strong support system to bolster me during the tough days of solo practice. With great mentors, you will be well on your way to success.

Lesson #2: Don't try to reinvent the wheel. Don't waste time trying to do everything yourself. Being a solo is a misnomer—

solos feel a deep sense of camaraderie and most won't think twice about sharing form contracts, pleading forms, and advice.

Lesson #3: Partner with people who rock. I partner with law firms on cases and refer cases to other attorneys who refer cases back to me. I have developed of counsel relationships with attorneys who have experience in legal areas that I am still learning. Solo does not mean alone. You can blaze a trail for your practice while maintaining positive and healthy relationships with those around you. Those relationships sustain you on the days when you question your sanity for having started a practice in the first place.

Lesson #4: Don't be afraid to step out of your comfort zone. At an ABA Midyear Meeting in Chicago, I found myself on a

panel of commercial real-estate attorneys who have probably closed more high-dollar complex deals than I could ever imagine. I was the only young lawyer on the panel and was quite nervous. Needless to say, I made it through, and that experience helped me develop the courage to perhaps do it again.

Lesson #5: Work hard, play hard. I work long hours and often think about my work during free time. Admittedly, I am still working on the "play hard" part. When I do have time to play, I indulge myself with spa days, massages, travel, belly-dancing class, a basketball league, and yoga. Not only do these activities rejuvenate my tired mind, they also give me the incentive to do needed administrative and financial-management tasks.

Lesson #6: Generate good karma. Karma is like a boomerang—it always comes back to you. Extend professional courtesies when you do not have to, and realize that good deeds generate good karma. After all, you never know when you will



need that extension or have to cut in front of someone to make a postmark deadline. Good deeds also build relationships. And in the legal business, relationships go a long way.

Lesson #7: Keep yourself going. When I need to get focused, centered, or motivated, I play what I call "theme music." It puts me in the zone. Laughing is also key.

Lesson #8: Have a Plan B. I had a huge setback at the beginning of the year when a merger fell through. My mom always says have a Plan B. Thomas Edison said that he would rather fail at something he loved than succeed at something that he hated. While I do not anticipate failure, I do have a Plan B—early retirement.

Lesson #9: Say thanks. Be generous with praise and gratitude.

Lesson #10: Dream bigger. "Even a small star shines in the darkness."—Danish Proverb

This article is an adaptation of "Women Starting a Law Practice" by Youshea A. Berry, published in *101 Practice Series*, 2006. www.abanet.org/yld/101. Copyright © 2006 by the American Bar Association. Reprinted with permission.

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READY RESOURCES

■ *Every Relationship Matters: Using the Power of Relationships to Transform Your Business, Your Firm, and Yourself.* 2007. PC # 1620213.

To order online, visit www.ababooks.org.

Giving Back to First Responders

THE ABA YLD 2007-08 PUBLIC SERVICE PROJECT

By Daniel McKenna

On September 11, 2001, thousands of first responders risked their lives to save their fellow Americans. Three hundred and forty-three firefighters, twenty-three police officers, and thirty-seven port-authority police officers made the ultimate sacrifice. On June 18, 2007, nine firefighters paid the same price battling a furniture-store fire in South Carolina. Every day, in every town and city across the nation, first responders—firefighters, police, and EMT—put their lives at risk to protect us.



During the 2007-08 bar year, the ABA Young Lawyers Division will show its respect and support for these American heroes by naming the Wills for Heroes® Program as its public service project. In partnership with The Wills for Heroes® Foundation, the YLD will encourage its affiliates and 140,000 members to bring this unique, much-needed program to their local first responders.

Wills for Heroes programs provide free wills, living wills, and healthcare and financial powers of attorney to first responders and their spouses or domestic partners. Since

November 2001, the programs have prepared over 6,000 estate-planning documents for first responders. Programs are active in Arizona, Georgia, Minnesota, Ohio, South Carolina, Virginia, and Washington. Due to the overwhelming success of the program, lawyers and first responders from more than a dozen states have requested more information about the program.

Together, the YLD and Wills for Heroes Foundation are working to answer this call by facilitating the integration of these programs into every state, local, and specialty bar association and law firm interested in celebrating these American heroes. The only requirement for an organization to participate is a commitment to the implementation and continuation of the program. It is a public service project that by its very nature expresses respect and support for first responders and that exemplifies public service by “protecting those who protect us.”®

Unfortunately many first responders do not have estate plans. With your support, the YLD, in partnership with the Wills for Heroes Foundation, can remedy that problem. Learn more about the Wills for Heroes Foundation at www.willsforheroes.com. If you are interested in being involved in the Wills for Heroes Public Service Project, contact Daniel McKenna at mckennad@ballardspahr.com or visit www.abanet.org/yld/wills.

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result of the bill's passage, a number of states have started LRAPs to help reduce debt for newer attorneys.

State LRAPs have existed for several years. Twenty states operate LRAPs: Arizona, the District of Columbia, Florida, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, New Hampshire, New Mexico,

Debt Relief

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federal pilot program for loan-repayment assistance programs (LRAPs) by funding of the Legal Services Corporation (LSC). LSC-funded agencies were able to provide loan repayment assistance to qualifying attorneys. YLD leadership lobbied Congress for this legal services bill. As a

New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Texas, and Washington. Other states considering LRAPs include California, Iowa, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and Vermont.

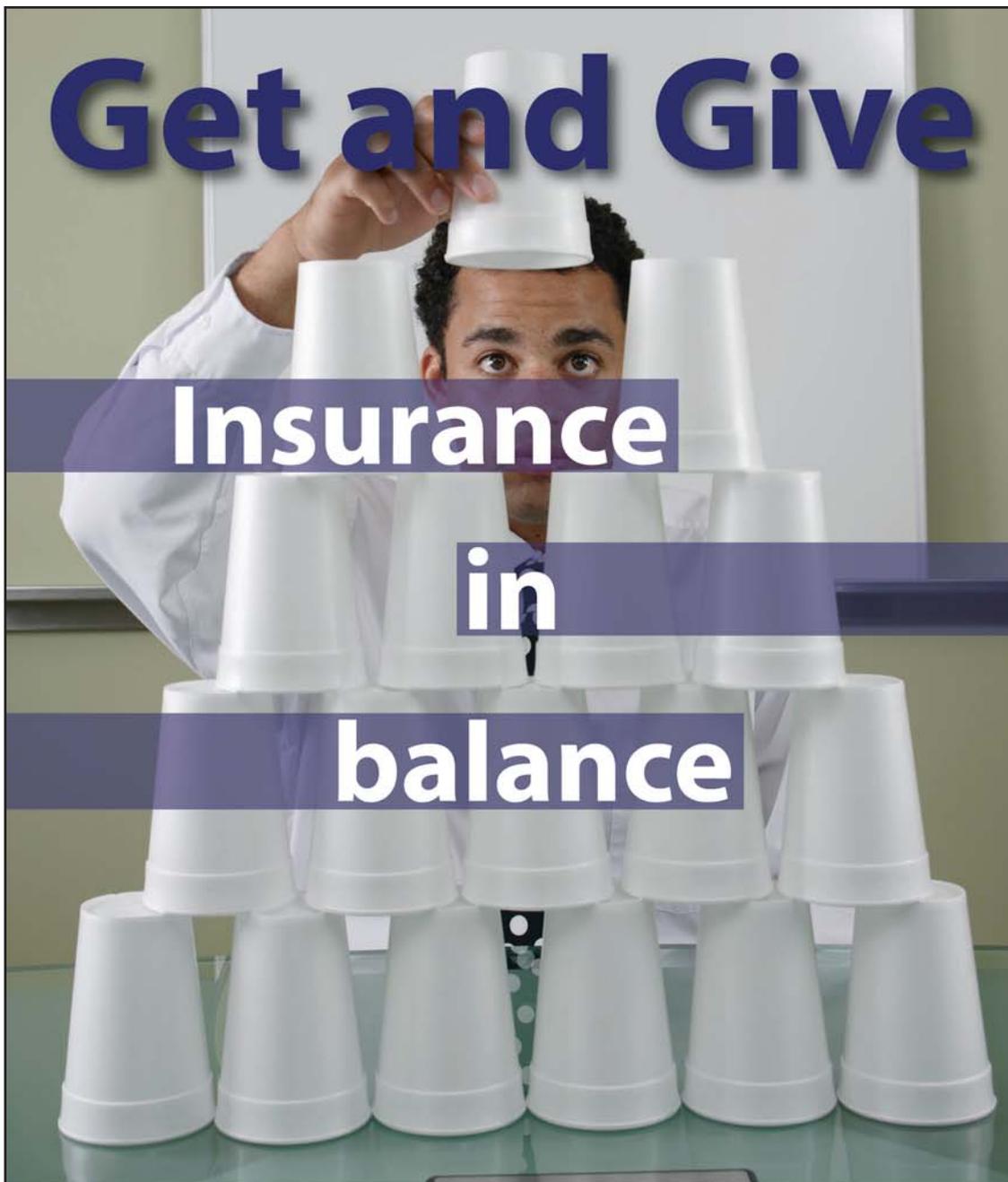
Many of these LRAPs are funded through state legislative appropriations and private dollars. Other LRAPs receive funding through the Interest on Lawyers Trust Accounts (IOLTA).

IOLTA dollars are used primarily for maintaining quality legal-aid funding, but they are often collected and allocated by state bar foundations and can serve as a funding source to begin or support a state's LRAP.

The YLD is committed to supporting these and other methods to relieve student debt burdens on its members. It lobbies Congress annually at ABA Day to

support related legislation consistent with YLD policies created by the YLD Assembly. The next YLD Spring Conference will be held in conjunction with ABA Day in Washington, D.C., April 16-19, 2008.

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Fall Conference highlights include:

- Extensive networking opportunities
- Over twelve CLE and professional-development program options
- The Young Bar Leader Summit, which will provide state, local, and specialty young-lawyer organization leaders public-service and leadership training and an opportunity to discuss their concerns, including membership, structure, and project funding
- The implementation of the ABA YLD 2007–08 Public Service Project “Wills for Heroes,” which allows us to devise simple wills for first responders on a pro bono basis

GO ONLINE FOR MORE INFORMATION
AND TO REGISTER
www.abanet.org/yld/fall07



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SAVE THE DATE

The ABA Commission on Women in the Profession and Young Lawyer Division will hold the Third Women in Law Leadership (WILL) Academy in Chicago on November 8–9, 2007. The WILL Academy is designed to help early- to mid-career women lawyers enhance their leadership skills, motivate them to stay in the profession, and increase their capacities to better direct their own careers through mentors and networking.

Take charge of your leadership potential. Self-assess. Build your own personal leadership plan. Hear from those who have led the way before you, and take away practical, concrete advice and guidance. Visit the WILL Academy home page at www.abanet.org/women/will.html or call (312) 988-5715 for more details. **The registration deadline is October 15.**

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Tips for Starting Your Own Legal Blog

By Lou Michels

A legal blog is a simple and inexpensive way to reach a target audience or anyone who may be surfing for particular legal content or information. If written well and used wisely, a legal blog can be a good networking and marketing tool to help you grow your practice, become involved in public service, and sharpen your writing skills. Keep the following points in mind when starting your own legal blog.

Find the time. The relatively informal nature of blogs means you do not have to spend a lot of time preparing content because you can write whenever you are able. Most practicing attorneys probably do not have time to keep a blog fully populated, so you may want to have a co-author who can help with generating content and ideas,

proofreading, or the other details that go into creating a polished written product. Finding a suitable case or situation on which to comment and the proper focus to write also requires time.

Know your audience. The Internet provides a potential audience of millions, so you must assume that portions of that audience will be your clients either by accident or intention, your partners, or even a judge before whom you will appear in the next few weeks. What you write should reflect your very best written work.

Choose your content. Minimize personal life stories, but maximize expressions of your personal opinion on a particular case or legal situation. You can mix informative commentary with reviews of outra-

geous or eye-catching cases that are just fun to talk about. You can keep track of the hits on each of the articles to gauge what your audience is interested in reading. Expect to receive responses from your readers.

Choose your style. Make your legal commentary incisive, insightful, and humorous. Blogs should be written in an entertaining style; after all, you are trying to catch readers. But do not operate on the assumption that you can simply create an entry using a stream-of-consciousness approach with no editing and have a product you want associated with your name. Legal blogs written by identified lawyers should not provide the same potential for embarrassment as many popular social Web sites do.

Proofread. Nothing looks worse than a blog written by a language specialist (you) that has typos or grammatical errors or that is filled with *non sequiturs*. Before you post anything online, always re-read and proofread your blog.

So write well and try to write often. You want people to want to read what *you* are saying, versus the other 25,000 lawyers who are writing on the Internet. With a conscientious and creative legal blog, you can build a responsive and appreciative audience.

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READY RESOURCES

- *Weblogs as a Marketing Vehicle*. PC # 5110535CHP11. Law Practice Management Section.
- See 101 Practice Series at www.abanet.org/yld/101. Search for “Marketing Your Own Law Practice with a Blog.”

To order online, visit www.ababooks.org.

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