Happy Monday, ATJ Enthusiasts! It was a delight to see so many of this digest’s nine readers at last week’s Equal Justice Conference and the National ATJ Meeting. Even if only once a year, it is heartening to be among ATJ advocates from throughout the U.S. – our attendees came from as far as the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, and Alaska (to say nothing of my new Canadian friends) – to share ideas and visions for how to strengthen our civil justice system.

Your author is in the mountains of Oregon and soon to be traipsing about Smith Rock State Park and the Columbia River Gorge. So today’s edition, which comes to you from a hotel in the city of Bend and which has been completed over an out-of-this-world bowl of oatmeal, will be a quick read. Here we go: ATJ news in very, very short:

- CA ATJ Commission rolling out project to grow incubator programs
- The case for legal aid funding to support DV survivors in MA
- The state of civil legal aid in ME
- TN ATJ Commission taps law school dean as next chair
- The rise of corporate pro bono
- Pro bono reporting and disclosure has ruffled NY feathers
- In DC, federal judges praise law firm pro bono at the annual “40 at 50” breakfast
- Senators and Congressmen/women go on the record in support of LSC

The summaries:

- May, 2014 – the California Commission on Access to Justice is launching a program to, well, launch more incubators: “At the first regional meeting of the Modest Means Incubator Projects on April 24, [CA Supreme Court Justice Goodwin Liu] highlighted the challenges court users face in California, which has one of the highest poverty rates in the country. The first of three such meetings scheduled this year, the event brought together representatives of legal aid foundations, MCLE providers, law schools and bar associations, to learn about incubator programs helping to bridge the justice gap – and to brainstorm ideas for starting others.” (California Bar Journal)

- 5.2.14 – Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation director Lonnie Powers makes the case for funding legal aid to serve domestic violence survivors: “Here in Cambridge, we continually see the positive results that this work can bring through the work of Community Legal Services and Counseling Center on West Street, and Greater Boston Legal Services, which also works in the city. The court system can be scary and overwhelming for people who are already vulnerable. Without strong legal advocacy and other professional support, people in abusive relationships can be easily persuaded or intimidated out of pursuing legal action against their abusers. Research shows that the availability of civil legal services significantly reduces the likelihood that a woman will be battered….” (Wicked Local website)

- 5.1.14 – On the occasion of Law Day, a look at at the state of civil legal aid in the Pine Tree State, as well a mention of “Lawyers in Libraries”, a project run by the Maine Justice Action Group which places volunteer lawyers in local libraries for community education programs. (Op-ed from Maine Bar Foundation director Diana Scully in the Portland Press Herald)

- 4.25.14 – “University of Tennessee Law Dean Doug Blaze will chair the state’s Access to Justice Commission for the next two years. Blaze, who has served on the commission since its inception in April 2009, will lead the group through March 31, 2016.” (Knoxville News Sentinel)

- 4.25.14 – Brad Smith and Laura Klein, general counsels of Microsoft and Clorox respectively, highlight the rise of corporate pro bono: “This year, [the Corporate Pro Bono project released ‘CPBO Challenge® Report: 2007-2012, The Development of In-House Pro Bono.’] This publication analyzes data reported by CPBO Challenge signatories from 2007-
2012 and paints a detailed picture of the evolution of in-house pro bono over that time. The report quantifies many of the developments in in-house pro bono that we have witnessed firsthand.” (Corporate Counsel)

- 4.23.14 – Lillian Moy of the ABA Standing Committee on Pro Bono looks at the controversy within New York State legal circles about the prospect of mandatory reporting of both pro bono hours and financial contributions to legal aid providers, as well as the issue of having those reports made publicly available. (For more on states that require pro bono reporting, see this table. New York, which adopted required reporting last May, became the eighth state to do so.)

- 4.23.14 – “Federal judges in Washington gathered Wednesday to honor 30 law firms where at least 40 percent of all lawyers performed at least 50 hours of pro bono service last year…. Wednesday’s event at the E. Barrett Prettyman U.S. Courthouse marked the 11th annual “40 at 50” Judicial Pro Bono Recognition Breakfast. (National Law Journal)

- 4.16.14 – NLADA tweeted – it’s a verb, accept it – this bit of good news: “We commend 45 Senators and 104 Reps for telling Congress to support critical legal assistance.” Here’s the Senators’ letter (4.11.14) letter and here’s the one from House Members (3.31.14). Those of you who are amateur handwriting experts will enjoy looking at all of these signatures.
Happy Monday, ATJ Enthusiasts. Looks better if you click on the image to expand it, but anyway a pair of seagulls joined me in watching the sun rise over Lake Michigan this morning. Three items for your consideration before the ATJ news:

- A short article from an Australian judge, entitled, “How I Learned to Drop Latin and Love Plain Legal Language.” The piece, which is rich with history and a fun read – unless you’re French or a fan of the Norman Conquest – ends with the “Ten Commandments of Clarity” in legal writing.
- The trend of poverty’s move out to the ‘burbs has received much media attention over the past few years. Here’s the New York Times’ most recent offering (video and article), “Hardship Makes a New Home in the Suburbs.”
- The National Law Journal’s multi-story report on successes and shortcomings in efforts to boost diversity in the legal profession.

And on to the ATJ news. First the short version:

- DC ATJ Commission’s law-firm fundraising campaign collects $4 million
- IA Supreme Court distributes annual IOLTA grants
- CT legislation to expand legal aid funding signed into law
- new veterans pro bono clinic launching at Veterans Admin. in SC
- the importance of emphasizing legal aid’s non-means-tested resources
- “ATJ” will be a topic on future Massachusetts bar exams (a nationwide first)
- two new self-help videos produced by MD ATJ Commission
AZ will launch ATJ Commission in coming months
Updated WY rules on limited, non-attorney practice
Federal law would expand IOLTA fund regulatory protections at credit unions
Equal Justice Works launching Employment Opportunity Legal Corps
PA report call for increased state legal aid funding & launching ATJ Commission
LSC’s monthly newsletter
More from MD: longitudinal report on 10 years of required attorney pro bono reporting

Now the summaries:

- 5.18.14 – “Forty-three law firms have contributed a collective $4 million dollars to legal services providers in the District, through a program spearheaded by the D.C. Access to Justice Commission. The program, called Raising the Bar, asks law firms to set aside a portion of revenue from their District office — between 0.075 and 0.11 percent — for legal services providers. In 2011, the first year of the program, 23 law firms donated a total of $3 million. Participation and contributions from law firms have both risen steadily since then. In 2012, 36 firms donated nearly $3.6 million. This year’s contributions marked a high point in both the number of participating law firms, and the amount raised.” (Washington Post)
- 5.15.14 – “More than $282,000 in grants that will help nonprofit legal [aid] programs has been awarded by the Iowa Supreme Court…. The court awarded grant money for the fiscal year that begins July 1 to 16 programs and groups across the state, according to the release. The money awarded by the court comes in through the state’s Interest on Lawyers’ Trust Account program.” (Des Moines Register)
- 5.13.14 – “Connecticut lawmakers have averted a potential $4.5 million cut to legal aid services that agencies say would have forced them to turn away hundreds of low-income people seeking help with legal issues ranging from domestic violence to evictions. The General Assembly last week approved a plan to continue using increased court filing fees to fund legal aid, as part of a massive budget bill adopted just before the legislative session ended May 7.” (Associated Press and Connecticut Law Tribune)
- 5.12.14 – a new veterans legal clinic, Lawyers 4 Vets, launching in South Carolina: “The pro-bono program is a joint effort by the Appleseed Legal Justice Center and Nelson Mullins Riley & Scarborough Law Firm. Attorneys will assist low-income veterans with obtaining identification papers, child support and visitation issues, obtaining pardons or clearing legal records, simple wills and powers of attorney, among other matters. The clinic officially starts May 15 at the VA Medical Center in Columbia.” (Associated Press via the Washington Times)
- 5.9.14 – ATJ blogger extraordinaire Richard Zorza has thoughts on recent efforts, lead by Voices for Civil Justice, to better message civil legal aid’s social importance: “One of the clearest messages from the communications research is that the best — perhaps the only — way to get public support for increased resources for court and community based legal aid above the needed 50% threshold is to emphasize the non-means tested services that are available to all. Perhaps preeminent among those are the online information and forms that are now available respectively in all or most states with help from court and community based legal aid in those states.”
- 5.9.14 – “Starting in July 2016, prospective lawyers taking the Massachusetts bar exam will be tested not just on traditional topics such as constitutional law, torts and property, but also
on access to justice. On April 25, the state’s Supreme Judicial Court approved a rule adding access to justice to the exam and indicating that applicants will be expected to be familiar with the topic. The rule makes Massachusetts the first state to add this topic to the bar exam.” (Robert Ambrogi’s Law Blog)

- 5.8.14 – the Maryland ATJ Commission has produced two new videos for people who must go to court: “Should I Represent Myself?” looks at whether or not to handle your own legal issues, and outlines several considerations including whether it is a civil or criminal case, how complex the issue is that needs to be resolved, and how serious the consequences are. ‘Hiring and Working with Your Lawyer’ focuses on finding and paying for a lawyer, what to do if you cannot afford a lawyer, and how to work with a lawyer to get the best representation.” (Press release)

- 5.8.14 – an ATJ Commission will launch in Arizona this year. From the AZ Attorney Blog, which covered the Law Day announcement: “Vice Chief Justice Scott Bales announced the formation of a new Access to Justice Commission, which will be headed by Court of appeals Judge Larry Winthrop. Justice Bales said that there have been significant successes in Arizona’s goal of increased access. But this new commission will recognize current challenges, and “It will help to focus and achieve tailored plans for success.”
  - My friend Karen Lash of the U.S. DOJ’s Access to Justice Initiative delivered the Law Day event’s keynote, and hit the point that I think best conveys the momentum surrounding the Commission movement: in roughly 20 years we’ve gone from zero Commissions to 34.

- 5.7.14 – “The Wyoming State Bar today announced the adoption of updated rules that address situations where legal services may be provided by non-lawyers and also provide an enforcement mechanism to deal with those who are harming the public through the unauthorized practice of law.” (Media release)

- 5.6.14 – a bill that will provide additional regulatory protections to IOLTA funds held in credit unions passed the U.S. House with bipartisan support. The Credit Union Times covered it: “H.R. 3468…would provide federal [National Credit Union Share Insurance Fund] coverage for trust accounts, including Interest on Lawyer Trust Accounts.” The bill enjoys credit union industry support and ABA President Jim Silkenat put out a statement reinforcing the value of stable trust account options in catalyzing civil legal aid funding. Most of this blog’s readers will understand IOLTA’s role in funding civil legal aid, but if this is a bunch of gibberish to you, here’s some background.

- 5.6.14 – “Criminal records are a major hurdle to landing a job, which is why removing barriers to employment for low-income workers is the focus of Equal Justice Works’ next national program. Equal Justice Works—a Washington nonprofit organization that supports public-interest law careers—last week won $1.4 million from AmeriCorps to launch an Employment Opportunity Legal Corps. The legal aid organizations and Equal Justice Works will also contribute $1.1 million, giving the project a $2.5 million budget for three years. Organizers will send 40 lawyers and 360 law students to legal aid organizations around the country starting in August.” (National Law Journal)

- May, 2014 – the Pennsylvania Civil Legal Justice Coalition has submitted a report to the state senate offering three recommendations for strengthening the state’s civil legal aid community:
  - an annual $50 million legislative appropriation for legal aid
  - the Supreme Court establishing an Access to Justice Commission
  - work to establishing a right to counsel “in civil legal matters in which basic human needs are at stake.”
- May, 2014 – this month’s edition of *LSC Updates* includes the following: “On April 30, the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies marked up its appropriations bill for FY 2015. The subcommittee provided $350 million for LSC, $319,650,000 of which is for basic field programs. Last year, the same subcommittee approved only $300 million for FY 2014.”

- April, 2014 – the Maryland ATJ Commission has co-authored the “*Longitudinal Analysis of Pro Bono Reporting: 2002-12.*” As far as I know this is the first report of its kind from the states that have required pro bono reporting.

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