

**Remarks of LSC Chairman Frank Strickland**  
*EJC Conference, Saturday Session, April 17, 2004, Atlanta, GA*

Thank you Phyllis for your generous introduction, and thanks to the NLADA and the ABA for putting on another first-rate conference.

First, I want to recognize three friends who have been my mentors in legal services for many years: Phyllis Holmen, executive director of Georgia Legal Services; Steve Gottlieb, executive director of the Atlanta Legal Aid Society; and Bucky Askew, a former member of the LSC Board. Please stand and be recognized.

It has been a year now since I assumed the Chairmanship of the Legal Services Corporation Board of Directors. My experiences in that time have given me a renewed appreciation for how important it is for us to come together in this national forum to share ideas. As a result of my service on the LSC Board, perhaps the greatest fringe benefit and privilege for me has been getting to know so many of you in this room and throughout the

broader legal services community. I have tremendous respect for all of you and the work you do.

I was delighted that the conference organizers chose my hometown as the venue for this year's meeting. I grew up in Atlanta and I've spent 37 years in private practice here. Like most of my neighbors, I have a deep fondness for this city and all that it represents. I hope that you have enjoyed visiting us as much as we've enjoyed having you here these past few days. I also hope you've had a chance to venture out during breaks in the conference to get a taste of why those of us who live here are so proud of the progress Atlanta has made – and proud of our standing as one of America's fastest-growing cities.

Before we hosted the Olympic Games....and before companies like Coca-Cola, UPS and Bell South helped turn us into a major corporate player...and before the Atlanta Braves won all those pennants and staked their rightful claim as America's team...Atlanta was already recognized for its historic significance as a cradle of the modern civil rights movement. Several decades

later, Atlanta's continued commitment to equality – and, in particular, to equal justice under the law – is one of our city's most enduring legacies. So it is fitting that we have a visionary leader like Dennis Archer with us today to talk about how our legal system can help provide fundamental fairness in our society and how – on its best days – it can reinforce the promise of the American dream to the disenfranchised.

My fellow LSC Board members and I have been doing all we can in furtherance of this vital mission. Last November we made what I would consider the most enlightened decision of our first year together when we offered the LSC Presidency to a leader familiar to most of you. Helaine Barnett honored us by accepting our offer to lead LSC, and I think you will agree that the legal services community is lucky to have her at the helm. Helaine brings to the table 37 years of fighting for the legal rights of the poor as an advocate and manager at the Legal Aid Society of New York. She brings unprecedented hands-on experience as a legal services provider to the job as LSC President. Her passion for

equal justice has been an energizing force in Washington, and I hope, a reassuring affirmation about LSC's direction to those of you who rely on federal funding to carry out your important work.

A few weeks ago, I accompanied Helaine to Capitol Hill for hearings on back-to-back days in the House of Representatives. Helaine testified before our Judiciary oversight subcommittee on March 31, and I joined her on April 1 to offer testimony before our appropriations subcommittee. To anyone who has followed the sometimes-acrimonious history of LSC on the Hill, our two experiences were a breath of fresh air.

It was impossible to emerge from those two days with lawmakers without feeling that LSC has achieved true bipartisan support in Congress. In fact, our two committee chairmen virtually said as much. Chairman Chris Cannon of Utah said during our oversight hearing that LSC and federally funded legal aid have achieved near unanimity of support in Washington. The very next day, Chairman Frank Wolf of Virginia – who heads the panel that funds all justice programs – said he was “very comfortable” with

LSC and took notice of the fact that LSC's one-time detractors in Congress no longer express reservations about the people they're helping. Indeed, Chairman Wolf went a step further. He singled out legal services lawyers for their devotion to their clients and expressed his belief that they often provide better representation than paid lawyers because they care so much about their clients. He then indicated he would support a pilot loan forgiveness program to help attract law school graduates to legal services jobs. Chairman Wolf has been an LSC supporter since President Bush took office, but this was undoubtedly his strongest affirmation of legal services to date.

The LSC Board is committed to delivering access to civil justice to more eligible low-income Americans. Helaine and I explained to the appropriations leaders that current resources are insufficient to meet the overwhelming need for assistance, and we were bold enough to ask for a four percent increase in LSC's FY05 budget. This may be a tough fiscal year to get such an increase given America's defense and homeland security needs, but we will

continue to make the case to Congress that you need their support to help all those who rely on the services you provide.

In the meantime, I am thoroughly impressed with the many innovative ideas I have heard about during this conference to do more with less and to recruit additional help from the private bar. The genesis of my own involvement in legal services can be traced back to a major pro bono project instituted during my term as President of the Atlanta Bar Association in the mid-1980s to provide representation to 800 Cuban detainees who had fled the repression of their homeland in the Freedom Flotilla. Shortly after their arrival on our shores, they were detained by the INS in the Atlanta Federal Penitentiary, a maximum security prison. They had no access to justice; most didn't even speak English and didn't understand the issues facing them. Imagine how you would feel if the situation were reversed and you were detained in a foreign country where you didn't speak the language. We recruited 400 pro bono lawyers to represent these Cubans in administrative

parole proceedings, giving them a taste of our democracy's precious freedoms.

All of us know how rewarding it can be to be champions of justice to those to whom it has been routinely denied. The Pro Bono Professional Awards to be presented today are an affirmation of the genuine good we can accomplish as lawyers. For years, LSC has partnered with the ABA to recruit and assign pro bono lawyers to clients who need their help. This is a partnership we must nurture and build on if we are to help more families prosper and more individuals achieve self-sufficiency. I hope everyone in this room will continue to convey to their private bar colleagues the importance of donating their time and valuable skills to this worthy cause. In return, we at LSC pledge to explore every option to secure the additional support you need to do your jobs. The LSC Board views all of you as advisors in this effort. Working together, I am optimistic we can move closer to a day when there will be true equal access to justice in America. Thank you.