



**John G. Levi, Chairman
LSC Board of Directors**

**Remarks at the Reception
For the LSC Board of Directors
Milwaukee, Wisconsin
July 29, 2010**

Thank you.

Chief Justice [Shirley] Abrahamson, it is a privilege for all of us to have you here. I've heard so many wonderful things about you over the years and your very distinguished career. It is a real honor to finally get to be with you. Thank you for those very inspiring remarks.

John Ebbott [executive director of Legal Action of Wisconsin,] and Rosemary Elbert, [executive director of Wisconsin Judicare,] thank you for organizing this evening's program and for your efforts to involve private attorneys in your work. I also want to thank our distinguished guests who are about to be recognized for providing an important and critical service on behalf of their communities and for *being there* for clients.

A special thank you to the law firms and practitioners who support legal assistance programs—so many of you are here this evening. All the law firms donate valuable time and expertise to helping clients maintain their livelihoods, stay in their homes and escape domestic violence.

The support of the private bar, the support of law firm partners and associates, and the willingness of volunteers to take on difficult cases cannot be overstated. From my perspective, what has come together somewhat haphazardly over the years in the area of civil legal assistance now likely represents one of the very best public-private partnerships in our nation—from the standpoint of funding to the significant value of donated professional services.

Here in Wisconsin, that partnership is on display every day. LSC provides about half of the funding for Legal Action, and the program receives the other half of its funding from 40 other public and private sources, such as a state appropriation that has the support of Governor [Jim] Doyle; the Wisconsin Equal Justice Fund, which is the statewide private bar fundraising campaign, and the Wisconsin Trust Account Foundation, the IOLTA program. And Legal Action's work is further enhanced by thousands of hours of donated lawyer time.

Wisconsin Judicare, of course, also involves private attorneys in its work, and it is great to see that this model of legal assistance works so well in this state.

But, as you know, we need to do more. All of you in this room, we need your voices in the cause for equal justice. There are 54 million Americans who qualify for legal assistance at our fairly rigorous standard, and the magnitude of this challenge is fairly daunting. We must do a better job of reaching out to the public and to our colleagues in the profession to enlist them in this effort.

This is an important time for LSC. The Corporation has a new Board, I am honored to have been named by President Obama, and as you watch us in coming months, I think you will see that we are an energetic and serious group that hopes and expects to accomplish much during its time in office.

And as a Chicagoan who regards Wisconsin as my second home, having spent significant time here in magnificent Door County, where our family has had a summer home for decades, it is wonderful to have our second quarterly Board meeting here in this remarkable state.

Let me introduce the Board.

Our vice chair is Martha Minow, who you have met and whose father is my mentor.

Robert Grey, whose plane is late, of Richmond, Virginia, is a partner with Hunton & Williams, a former president of the American Bar Association.

Charles Keckler, a professor at Penn State's Dickinson School of Law. He is a former deputy assistant secretary at the federal Administration for Children and Families.

Victor Maddox, a partner in the Louisville, Kentucky law firm of Fultz Maddox Hovious & Dickens, PLC and a former counsel to the Senate Judiciary Committee.

Sharon Browne of Sacramento, a principal attorney in the Pacific Legal Foundation's Individual Rights Practice group and a member of the Foundation's senior management.

And Laurie Mikva, who may not be here. She served for nearly 30 years as a civil legal aid attorney and a public defender in Illinois and Maryland, and helped establish the Domestic Violence Clinic, a Land of Lincoln partnership with the University of Illinois College of Law. Laurie's dad also grew up in Milwaukee, and Abner Mikva and Newton Minow were childhood friends here in Milwaukee and have remained lifelong intimate friends.

The nominees cleared by Committee and awaiting confirmation by the Senate are here:

Julie Reiskin, executive director of the Colorado Cross-Disability Coalition and an expert on disability issues and health policy issues.

Gloria Valencia-Weber, a law professor at the University of New Mexico, who has a strong record in helping Native Americans obtain necessary legal services.

While we are still a Board in transition, we are already extremely busy. The Board has launched a nationwide search for a new LSC president. The process for identifying potential candidates for the LSC presidency is underway and we hope to successfully conclude our search by year end. If you know any outstanding, interested individuals who want to become the next president of LSC, please don't hesitate to let us know.

The Board has already promulgated an updated accounting guide and is in the process of commissioning a task force that will conduct an in-depth review of LSC's fiscal oversight responsibilities and how LSC conducts fiscal oversight of its grantees.

All this comes at a challenging time. We as a nation face a crisis in representation. Our own 2009 Justice Gap Report suggests that we cannot provide civil legal assistance to at least 50 percent of those who seek our help, and I know many of you here believe the percentage is even higher. The nation's civil courts are swamped with self-represented litigants.

To deal with these challenges, the LSC Board will, together with its new president, develop a strategic plan for the coming years that will take a hard look at how best to expand and extend our resources. Our chief priority now is to find ways to increase the funds, not just federal, that permit many of you to fight each day for equal justice. Committees in the Senate and House have voted increases in LSC's budget for the coming year, but I know that IOLTA funds have been shrinking and we are still in need of far greater financial support.

We must continue to encourage pro bono, for as much as the private bar has done, we just have to find new ways of growing pro bono in order to have an even greater impact. And we have to do a better job of reaching out to the bar to enlist lawyers in all stages of a career—those who are retiring but still want a challenge, mid-career lawyers who want to give back, young lawyers and law school graduates who are eager to serve.

The LSC Board greatly appreciates your hard work and dedication here in Wisconsin. The fight for equal justice, as you well know, is a call to our country to keep faith with its founding values.

As Robert F. Kennedy reminded us, "As long as a man is handicapped before the bar of justice because of his poverty, our task as lawyers is not done."

Clearly, our work as lawyers is not done.

John Ebbott, thank you again for hosting our meeting, and now it is time to honor those exceptional Wisconsin citizens who have served the public interest and have donated so much of themselves in helping our country succeed in meeting its pledge of equal justice for all.