

Prepared Remarks of U.S. Senator Ben Nelson, Fla.
To ABA House of Delegates
February 8, 2010
Orlando, Fla.

Thank you ABA for coming to the aid of the Haitian people in the aftermath of last month's devastating earthquake.

Your work to create the Haiti Legal Development Fund should go a long way toward helping rebuild Haiti's legal and judicial system.

Many of you may know that 24 years ago I flew aboard the Space Shuttle Columbia into outer space. But what you may *not* know is that I was the only lawyer to fly in space.

NASA did not publicize that a lawyer was orbiting the earth!

I guess that says something about the unpopularity of lawyers!

Have you thought of yourself as a public servant – not just a private sector attorney? A big part of serving our communities requires that we have a legal system that is accessible to all, especially the least and most vulnerable among us.

A fair commentary is that a just society is organized around the principles of equality and human dignity; and that you judge a society by how it treats the underprivileged.

One of the challenges we face in trying to remain a just society is to ensure that every person – harmed or aggrieved for any reason – is able to find a place in our system of justice. Your profession is important. You protect them!

To effectively represent your client – you must have the tools to do the job. That includes a fair and impartial judiciary and funding for indigent clients.

An independent and impartial judiciary, a bedrock principle in this country, assures that we are treated as equals before the court, regardless of race, religion, gender, education or economic status.

It's essential that we closely scrutinize the records and backgrounds of the judicial nominees. I consider this to be one of my most important federal duties as Senator.

Another priority is providing robust funding for legal services for the poor.

With difficult economic conditions bring an influx of clients to the Legal Services Corporation, we have worked in Congress to increase their funding.

But we know it is still not enough to help everyone who needs it. There will continue to be significant, unmet needs among America's poorest.

In fact, the Legal Services Corporation's "Justice Gap in America" report concludes that for every one person who is helped by their programs, someone else is turned away.

And they found that for helping people facing foreclosure, they turn away two people for every one person served.

In Florida, we know all too well the difficulties of the housing market.

Why are we lawyers; a good living? What is our calling to be an attorney?

Each of us here today has a special calling in life; and, that's why we must remain rooted in public service and a public-servant attitude that extends beyond our office walls.

It's reassuring to see organizations like yours trying to help the country get back on its feet.

I want to commend your members who are working to protect the rights of the voiceless by defending the constitutional rights and civil liberties of all Americans.

But for the country to heal, we must change the discourse in the public square. Civility not savagery, is the only way a democracy may proceed and succeed.

Politics must not be an all or nothing blood sport where "I'm right and you're wrong" leaves little room for consensus, so essential to a democracy. We have stopped listening to each other.

As lawyers, you are advocates but you are officers of the court. In your daily practice you are the conciliators and mediators to find a solution.

Use your example, where it is good, to influence the conversation in politics.

I look forward to continuing to work with you to realize these objectives.

Thank you.