

Speech of Wm. T. (Bill) Robinson III  
August 10, 2010  
TRANSCRIPT

Thank you, thank you very much. Like Steve Zack, I want to begin by, again, asking you to recognize and express our appreciation to William Hubbard for the great job he's done as Chair of this House.

This is a wonderful day for the Robinson family as you might expect. Today, my family and I share a profound sense of gratitude, as I enthusiastically accept the responsibilities of serving as your next President-Elect.

First and foremost, of course, I want to recognize my family members who are here: beginning with my best friend and a special friend to many of you, my wife, Joan, to recognize our son Tay and his wife Jennifer and of course these two little people you've been seeing in pictures or so many years – they are real, they are here, Miss Brooke and William the 5<sup>th</sup>.

I want to share a quick little story with you. When they arrived for this meeting, I of course took them to the registration area to get them their badges and William especially was quite enamored with his badge.

He got it on with his lanyard and he kept looking at it and finally he looked at me and he said, "Grandpa, can I go to a meeting?"

And I said, "Sure, William, you can go to a meeting."

He keeps hearing every time he goes looking for Grandpa, Grandpa's "in a meeting," so we went hand-in-hand up the escalator over here; we came up to a meeting, a seminar that was going on with lots of lawyers in it. We sat in the back. William was very well-behaved. He looked around and said "Are these all lawyers?"

I said, "Yes, William. Look how they're paying attention just like you, in class. They're all focused on the person up there speaking and they're here learning."

He looked, then all of the sudden, he looked around and said, "Grandpa, I wanna be a lawyer!"

(William Hubbard: "Sign him up!")

You can imagine how that touched my heart.

I also want to pay homage to four persons who could not be here today, Joan's parents and my parents. They sacrificed so much to give our families the opportunities we enjoy today and we of course have them in our thoughts with gratitude and much love. If my dad were here, he'd look around this big hall and he'd say, "Billy -- this is a long way from the McCormick Hilton." And by that he'd be referring to the four-room apartment that our family grew up in on McCormick Street in urban Cincinnati. The ABA is an organization where opportunity reigns.

I want to recognize and thank my law firm, Frost Brown Todd, for its generosity and support in allowing me the extensive time and support that are needed to take on these responsibilities of ABA leadership. I am proud to report to you today that my law firm has stepped up to become a 100% member of the American Bar Association, giving us immediately 168 additional members. And I'd also like to point out that Steve Zack's firm has done exactly the same thing and Steve, and I, and Linda -- all of us -- are hoping that when you go home, you'll talk to your law firms and you'll persuade them to do the same thing. We need members. It's not only important for us from a revenue standpoint but it's also more important from a talent and volunteer leadership standpoint.

And of course, I want to thank you, the members of this House, for giving me this opportunity to again work closely with you and other leaders of the ABA over the next several years to help successfully guide this association through these troubled financial times. Following in the big footsteps of Carolyn Lamm and Steve Zack and so many other great American Bar Association presidents who have come before, I am determined to deliver continued effective leadership to this great association with commitment, calm and continuity.

For each of us, our fundamental obligation is to serve as stewards of this Association and of our profession. This requires discipline and focus. In every instance, the test has to be: what is in the best interest of the American Bar Association, what is in the best interest of the rule of law and what is in the best interest of our profession.

If you know me -- and most of you do -- you know I'm a born optimist. So I confidently see the current challenging situation as an opportunity ... a chance to move forward in a way that will make the ABA stronger and more relevant than ever.

My basic concept is to leverage our existing organization, in an entrepreneurial way. Let's harvest the best ideas from everyone and support coordinated efforts to make sure that what we achieve has the support of everyone. It is what I believe to be in the best interest of the Association.

We cannot ignore the fact that our profession has been hit hard by the economic crisis facing the country. You know the painful job numbers as well as I do. Perhaps only half of the lawyers who graduate from law school this year will have traditional jobs in our profession. And many of the lawyers who are entering or trying to continue in our profession are barely making ends meet. I'm thinking of the public interest lawyer recently reported in the *Courier Journal* in Louisville Kentucky, having to take a job delivering pizza in the evening to supplement a meager legal services salary.

The economy has had profound, adverse consequences for every bar association that we represent here in the House -- both mandatory and voluntary bar associations alike -- including the ABA. We must continue to have long-term, fiscal stability. Without that, we cannot accomplish anything of lasting value or impact.

We face a very challenging dilemma. We know we cannot stand still, but how do we adapt to this ever-changing, financial environment without losing or compromising our identity, without losing the essence of what the American Bar Association does and should stand for? I don't pretend to have all the answers, but I do have some ideas about basic concepts that I'd like to share with you today.

**First**, we should be very skeptical of any notion that there is a “silver bullet solution” for our financial problems and challenges. It is unrealistic to believe that there is a simple fix that somehow has eluded the dedicated and thoughtful lawyers who have preceded us in leadership. We cannot resist change, but we need to recognize that change is complex and will require flexibility and compromise.

**Second**, we have to be thoughtful, rather than “knee jerk” reflexive. We don’t want to be like the long-standing British comedy routine that goes something like this: “We have to do something. This is something. We have to do this.” Instead, we must be committed to long-term, consistent, well-reasoned approaches year after year. Steve Zack, Linda Klein and I will be working together with our officers and Board of Governors and future leaders of this Association, such as Laurel Bellows, to further build the continuity that is needed.

As Steve told you yesterday, he and I both joined the American Bar Association the same year, way back in 1972 and have been working closely together in the ABA for over 25 years. It will be a personal and a professional privilege to succeed Steve next year.

**Third**, the ABA needs an integrated approach, combining the creative Intelligence and energy of our volunteer leadership with the experience and expertise of our dedicated staff, led by Jack Rives. In the ABA, we are mutually dependent on one another. We need the best ideas from all corners of the organized bar including our sections, state and local bars and the specialty and ethnic bars.

Such an integrated approach, building on past work and leadership, is one of the best things we can do to enhance ABA membership. We have to convince lawyers throughout our states and home towns that the ABA is important to their practices and to the Rule of Law. There are certain things that really matter – like providing effective support for our Courts and for fair and equal access to justice, while assuring fair and impartial diversity in our Association and in our Profession. These require the leadership and support at the National level that only can be provided by the American Bar Association.

The same collaborative approach to new issues is needed as they arise. The ABA has many of the best informed attorneys in the country to help formulate the best response to issues as they become important to our profession in a complex and ever changing global economy. Ethics 20/20 is but one example of this. So when we face new challenges to our independence and to our role as lawyers – as we surely will – we must reach out to our existing Committees and Sections for assistance. With your help, the ABA will be out front.

It might not sound like soaring rhetoric to say: “We’ll make the best use of our existing resources.” But, as your past Treasurer, I can almost hear a bit of poetry in that. We can be certain that lawyers at home and lawyers here at the ABA will continue to sacrifice personal and family time to provide volunteer services and leadership here at the ABA. And we’ll continue to set the standard for volunteer service not only in our profession, but in this country. Lawyers working together can and will make a positive difference.

This isn’t false optimism on my part, it’s not contrived. We know from experience that we are correctly recognizing in our profession an ingrained commitment to public

service. It is an essential component of our professional DNA that binds us together as lawyers.

I, therefore, ask for your help today and for your continued support. Working together, we can and will make a positive difference. We can and will achieve meaningful, lasting, needed change that, in the years to come, will allow us to say: "Hey, at the ABA, we did some of our best work in the hardest of times, and we did it *together*."

Thank you all very, very much.