

A RENAISSANCE OF IDEALISM

A Lawyer's Gift of Time and Expertise Can Change a Needy Client's World

MICHAEL S. GRECO

LAST MONTH IN CHICAGO, WHEN I accepted the gavel from my good friend Robert J. Grey Jr., I reflected on how far we have come as a profession and as a nation, and what remains undone. As did our predecessors, President Grey opened the door further for all to enter and participate in our association's leadership. But the door must be opened wider so that more in our profession are afforded opportunities to serve.

An important obligation that comes with those opportunities is honoring the ideals that define our profession and that continue to attract our best and brightest to choose law as a career. In the coming year, I want to enable more of our colleagues to fulfill the time-honored role of lawyer as public citizen.

During my ABA travels, I have been continually impressed by the tireless work of America's lawyers to improve the law and the human condition both at home and abroad. That dedication serves to advance the ideals that guide our shared vision of equal justice for all.

It is in that spirit that I am calling for a renaissance of idealism in our profession, a recommitment to the noblest principles that define the profession: providing legal representation to assist the poor, disadvantaged and underprivileged; and performing public service that enhances the common good.

Thousands of lawyers throughout America show us the way by giving selflessly of their time to help those in need. Imagine what our profession could accomplish if annually each lawyer in America took on one pro bono case or one public service engagement in the community.

We could ensure that children receive the educations to

which they are legally entitled, including special assistance. We could help victims of domestic violence obtain critical legal protection and support for their children. We could ensure that people obtain necessary medical attention and fair treatment by doctors, HMOs, insurance providers and state agencies. We could enforce tenants' rights to adequate housing and ensure that due process is afforded in eviction proceedings. We could help small-business owners solve legal problems that jeopardize their livelihoods and the jobs of their employees. We could feel much better about ourselves and our profession.

TAKE IT UPON YOURSELVES

THE IMPORTANCE OF PROVIDING LEGAL REPRESENTATION for those who have great needs but limited resources cannot be overstated. It is a lifeline that makes the difference between stability and poverty, between hope and despair.

Lawyers unable to take on pro bono cases can serve the public good through a variety of community leadership and volunteer activities—including serving on a town or nonprofit group's board, running for elective office or coaching youth sports.

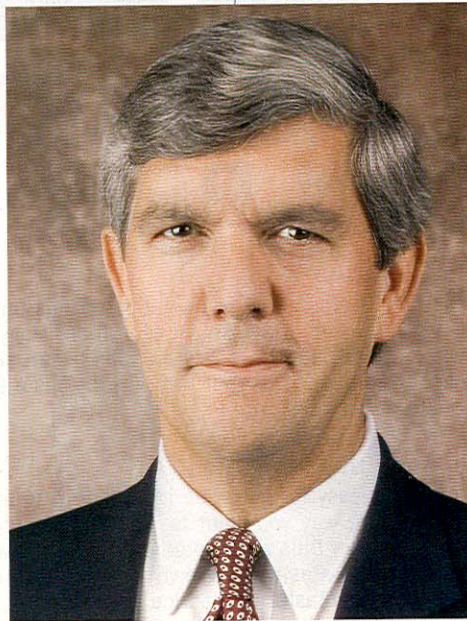
The ABA Commission on the Renaissance of Idealism in the Legal Profession, which I have just appointed, will help to implement this initiative. The commission will be led by honorary co-chairs U.S. Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg and New York City lawyer Theodore C. Sorensen, special counsel to President John F. Kennedy. They and chair Mark D. Agrast of Washington, D.C., will devise and help me implement strategies for enhancing lawyers' pro bono and public service work.

I ask you to help advance the commission's efforts to reinvigorate the spirit of idealism infused in our great profession. The outcome of the commission's work will be—must be—a challenge to law offices across America to undertake changes that will make the practice of law more fulfilling for lawyers, allow us to serve better the American people and our country, and enhance the public's appreciation of the legal profession.

We are living in a time of serious challenges to our profession and our country—among them protecting the independence of the judiciary and legal profession; advancing the rule of law abroad and defending it at home; ensuring access to justice for all in America; and above all, protecting the constitutional principles that have sustained our republic for

more than two centuries. There is much at stake. The lawyer's role in our society has never been more important.

I am confident that, with your active participation, we are up to these challenges. ■



Michael Greco: Can't do pro bono? Coach a youth team.