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ELECTION CYCLE: FINALLY OVER

Treasurer Janet Minor by acclamation has been re-elected for a second year to lead Convocation including 18 newly elected Benchers plus 2 new lay Benchers appointed by the Government.

BENCHER ELECTION

Approximately 16000 lawyers, representing about 34 per cent of the profession voted in the Spring election. That is the lowest turnout since at least 1987 when 56 per cent voted. There was no groundswell of votes from lawyers called to the bar in the last 10 years. Significant voter turnouts came from the larger firms. To be elected a Bencher within Toronto it was necessary to secure more than 3000 votes and to be elected outside Toronto required in excess of 2000 votes. This is the first election completing implementation of previous governance changes that restricted Bencher terms to 12 years. Thus we have many new Benchers in Convocation able to analyze and assess alternatives with a fresh look. This presents the Law Society with a wonderful opportunity to effect positive change.

DOCTORS OF LAW:

In recognition of outstanding achievements in service and benefit to the legal profession, the rule of law or the cause of justice, the honorary degree has been extended by the Law Society to:

The Honourable Marc Rosenberg
The Honourable Peter Milliken

Janet Stewart, Q.C.
Sheila Block

James Stewart
Julian Porter, Q.C.

Jean Teillet

EQUITY--LAW SOCIETY STYLE

The Law Society has been a national leader in matters of equity for all groups and interests. But not so when it comes to its own. Newly elected Benchers must justifiably attend an education programme scheduled in September, before being able to participate in discipline hearings. When informed of that obligation Benchers were told that their attendance is mandatory notwithstanding that those issuing the directive were aware that the dates overlapped a significant Jewish religious Holy Day. When it was asked that the schedule be reconsidered the decision to proceed was affirmed. After all, it was said lawful accommodation would be available to any Bencher wishing to self identify and indicate even though new to the elected position that he or she could not attend for religious reasons. There are certainly rationalizations available to justify the decision to proceed which was not inadvertantly made. But where is the sensitivity the Law Society expects of others. Perhaps the Society's motto must change from "Let Right Prevail" to "Do as we say not as we do".

CONVOCATION PROCESS:

Benchers have continued an unfortunate practice of approving matters in principle before details are presented for Convocation debate and review. It later becomes difficult for Convocation to consider afresh the substance of an issue in light of the earlier approval. Convocation thus practically (although not legally) fetters its own discretion. That decision making process should end.

BENCHER RETREAT-- Have Your Say

A detailed strategic planning process was commenced in the Spring. It has involved all Benchers completing extensive surveys and attending several working sessions.

Benchers will be attending a fall planning session. I urge you to call or email the Treasurer or any Bencher to tell us what you believe should be:

- 1) the top priorities for the Law Society in coming years;
- 2) what the Law Society should change or stop.

RULES OF PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT ---Have Your Say

Your input is being sought by October 16, 2015 to proposed changes to the Rules concerning:

- a) Conflicts of interest;
- b) Doing business with a client;
- c) Short-term legal services;

- d) Incriminating physical evidence;
- e) Advertising;

The Law Society website will provide an explanation of the proposed amendments and a blackline version of the rules showing proposed amendments.

CONVOCATION AND YOU

To promote effective communication with the profession the proceedings of Convocation were webcast this year to learn the professions' interest and assess the value of continuing with such broadcasts. Each webcast cost about \$1600.00 plus the human resources needed to support the external provider. From January to May the maximum number of viewers ranged from 17 to 52. However when high interest policy matters were being considered last fall, such as the debates around Pathways and Trinity Western University, the peak number of watchers was 153 and 226. The financial cost is only one factor in pursuing the objective of ensuring that Convocation is transparent and accessible. Alternatives were considered such as audio recordings and searchable transcripts being posted on the Law Society website. A thoughtful debate focused on cost effectiveness, utility to the profession and accessible transparent regulation. After a thorough discussion, Convocation decided overwhelmingly to continue webcasting future sessions. Hopefully, the next initiative will see the posting of the transcript of the public session of each meeting of Convocation on the Law Society's website.

REAL ESTATE ISSUES WORKING GROUP

This is a newly appointed group co-chaired by Sidney Troister and Jerry Udell. It is expected that this will create an opportunity to review a number of issues arising from real estate and transactional law practice based on research completed by the Professional Development and Competence Division.

LAWYERS MENTAL HEALTH

The Law Society's member assistance programme is provided by Homewood Health. It provides an invaluable resource to the profession in areas such as career counselling as well as legal and financial advisory services. Assistance is available to address future planning, peer support and of course work related stress. For information call 1.855.403.8922.

The Treasurer has lead a new initiative, now approved by Convocation, establishing a Task Force to create a Law Society strategy to promote wellness, address mental health and addiction issues.

HAVE A HAPPY, HEALTHY AND SAFE SUMMER!

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