

PRESIDENT'S PAGE

Anthony Tarricone

As I take over the reins of AAJ, we find ourselves in the midst of an economic downturn that has affected not only our profession and the people we represent but also virtually every business, profession, and association. We've also witnessed how this economy affects the legal rights of consumers, as auto manufacturers and other businesses seek bankruptcy protection that could wipe out pending and future claims against them.

Yet AAJ members have unprecedented opportunities now to ramp up our activism and commitment to our clients and to the core values and mission of this association. The 111th Congress is the most pro-civil-justice Congress in recent memory. This is due in part to the hard work of the staff members of AAJ's Public Affairs and Communications departments, who have educated members of Congress and the public about the importance of meaningful access to justice for ordinary citizens and consumers, and to the many AAJ members who have been on the front lines delivering our message with passion and vigor for many years.

Our aggressive legislative agenda for the coming year includes passage of the Medical Device Safety Act, which will restore the rights of consumers to seek justice in state courts when they have been harmed by unsafe medical devices; amendment of ERISA to ensure that Medicare subrogation is based on the "make-whole" doctrine; a prohibition on mandatory arbitration for nursing home and other consumer claims; changes to make it easier to sue foreign manufacturers of defective products imported into the United States; and restoration of rental car vicarious liability.

At the same time, we must ensure that landmark health care legislation now in the works does not diminish the rights of patients to seek compensation for injuries caused by medical negligence. Some business sectors see an opportunity in health care reform proposals to restrict access to justice as a quid pro quo for ensuring that all Americans have health insurance.

Carpe diem

To seize upon the opportunities before us, we need your support and activism—to deliver messages to your senators and representatives and to help build a stronger base of support for all that we do. Now is not the time to retreat; it is the time to ramp up our

activism and press our agenda to lawmakers and the public.

Membership matters—more now than ever—as we work to pass legislation expanding legal rights for our clients while ensuring that none are taken away. How can you help in this effort?

- Ensure that your colleagues, including lawyers in your own firm, become or remain AAJ members even during these tough economic times.
- Educate lawyers in your state about the critical importance of supporting both AAJ and your state trial lawyer association. Remind them that federal legislation and agency rulings and regulations affect the legal rights of citizens of every state. Many states are working with AAJ to establish a joint membership program, which will make it easier to encourage dual membership.
- Volunteer to be part of the nationwide AAJ Membership Outreach Task Force and make a real difference by participating in member recruitment by donating your time, not just writing a check. For more information about how to volunteer, contact AAJ Membership Director Tamara Kukla at tamara.kukla@justice.org.
- We have another unique opportunity at this pivotal time. When I ran for parliamentarian six years ago, in my campaign statement I said, “We’ve been told time and again that ATLA can’t afford a public relations campaign to improve the image of trial lawyers and the work they do. Today it is obvious that we cannot afford not to undertake such a campaign.” While we’ve made great progress in this area, we can do more.

The president and vice president of the United States, elected in our most recent and historic election, are both lawyers. So is the secretary of state. This alone enhances the image of our profession and provides a springboard to educate the public about the good work trial lawyers do representing individuals and giving voice to causes that often transcend the interests of one client.

With opportunities come challenges. But many hands make lighter work for all and render the most difficult task achievable. I welcome the support and help of every member—the very foundation of AAJ. Please know that I will work with you and for you to continue the mission of this great organization, building on the leadership of Immediate Past President Les Weisbrod and those who came before.

And please let me know what AAJ can do for you and your clients. Feel free to e-mail me at anthony.tarricone@justice.org.