

INSTITUTE FOR LEGISLATIVE AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

SPRING 2011 SUMMARY OF PROGRAMS

The Legislative Institute hosted several important programs during the spring term, 2011. Two principal events were the annual Fair Housing and Civil Rights Conference, and the Siena College summer legal fellows program. During Fair Housing Week in late April, distinguished speakers and guests gathered at the Law School Commons to discuss a wide variety of issues relating to housing and civil rights. A panel of experts examined the legal and practical questions surrounding predatory lending foreclosure. Case law and practical suggestions were explored to help victims develop remedies.

In addition, the question of the best strategies to integrate neighbors drew an enthusiastic audience. Affordable housing, inclusionary zoning, and other affirmative steps to further the goals of fair housing were fully vetted. Creating integrated neighborhoods is one thing; sustaining them is another. Audience members suggested a variety of ways in which both could become reality. Legal practitioners encouraged private firms to take on fair housing cases, in all of their aspects as it makes sense from social and business perspectives.

The conference devoted time to employment discrimination and ways to achieve diversity in the workplace. State officials and private individuals brought to this panel insightful observations on these timely themes.

The Conference attendees also had the privilege of hearing keynote speaker Edgar Kahn. Our luncheon keynoter was our own Judge William H. ("Hank") Abrashkin '78, who now serves as the Executive Director of the Springfield Housing Authority.



Joyce Raphail and Joey O'Rourke were our two legal fellows this past summer from Siena College. Joyce spent the summer working with Professor Lauren Carasik, who is conducting a pilot International Human Rights clinic this fall term. Human trafficking is a major issue confronting human rights advocates. It is difficult to uncover because the perpetrators use a variety of means to disguise their activities.

Among other topics, Joyce researched the laws of the states in the United States. Massachusetts was among only a handful of states that did not have a human trafficking law. During the summer program, however, the State Senate passed a bill, offered by Senator Mark Montigny (D), addressing human trafficking. It soon became public law. Senator Gale Candaras '82 (D) invited Joyce and Joey to join her on the floor of the Senate during the debate and vote on the bill.

Joey served as an assistant to Professor Julie Steiner, who has been researching the aftermath of the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico in April 2010. He gathered data relating to the many lawsuits that victims have filed against a variety of defendants. The civil actions generally seek damages for injuries to persons and property caused by the spill. The vast amount of litigation raises issues of judicial management as well as appropriate compensation.

Although BP has set up a fund of \$20 billion to compensate victims of the oil spill, critics of the program have commented on its inadequacy. Victims have complained about the slowness of the recovery, and "red tape" that has inhibited, in their view, the speedy delivery of a sufficient remedy.

(Top L to R) Siena College fellows Joey O'Rourke and Joyce Raphail with Institute Director Professor Arthur Wolf in front of a painting at the State House commemorating American troops during the First World War.
(Bottom L to R) Touring the Senate Reading Room (the old Senate Chamber) at the State House are Senator Mark Montigny (D - New Bedford), Joyce Raphail, Senator Gale Candaras '82 (D - Wilbraham), and Joey O'Rourke.