LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Professionalism in Times of Crisis

By Erich R. Eiselt, IMLA Assistant General Counsel and Editor

For the second time in three years, as our Mid-Year Conference was taking place in Washington DC, major events arose in other cities that focused the nation's attention on the role of public servants.

In May 2013, the Boston Marathon bombing shocked the country. Our collective support for Boston's first responders as they aided the fallen and pursued the perpetrators was unwavering. The aftermath of that terrible morning showed municipal workers at their best, calming the public and continuing to provide services while a manhunt played out.

Last month, news filtered through our 2015 Mid-Year Conference about spiraling civil unrest 30 miles to the north, as parts of Baltimore erupted in response to Freddie Gray's death following arrest and transport by police. This time, the national response to municipal government was slightly more nuanced. Law enforcement's critical responsibility in restoring the peace was unchallenged—but larger questions about government's role in the events and circumstances that aroused citizens to take to the streets were far more complicated.

These headlines, and many others around the country, remind us of the judgments and leadership that municipalities--and the IMLA members within them—are called upon to provide every day. As with many aspects of life, it is not in the mundane and day-to-day that one's skills and dedication are truly tested; it is in the unforeseen and extraordinary. Whether natural disasters like the cataclysmic weather patterns recently battering the Southwest or man-made violence destroying lives and neighborhoods, these crises require municipal governance at its best.

IMLA endeavors to further that goal, by promoting professional competence, transparency and respect for the rule of law. Our members enlighten one another about meeting these challenges, whether through the ListServ which we provide in conjunction with Municode, through our numerous webinars offered by leading experts, or at our conferences where formal and informal education occurs over a multi-day retreat. We have not hesitated to approach leading-edge issues, including police shootings, excessive force and qualified immunity. We bring to our stage not only domain experts from within our ranks but also participants whose viewpoints may be critical of local government policies, such as representatives from the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the Department of Labor, the Securities and Exchange Commission and the American Civil Liberties Union. As evidenced by our lead article, we aim to educate, and our membership is interested in that breadth of knowledge.

In that regard, we have been pleased to announce a special IMLA meeting next January in Havana, Cuba. Envisioned and instigated by IMLA's International Committee under the leadership of Ben Griffith, the Cuba trip will be an extraordinary opportunity for our own municipal attorneys to meet jurists, officials and everyday citizens in a society that has remained largely closed to Americans for more than 50 years.

Closer to home, our upcoming annual Conference in Las Vegas promises to be another excellent opportunity to enhance professional expertise and strengthen personal ties. We have already confirmed a superior slate of presenters from around the country to speak during our four-day convocation in early October. We hope you will consider joining your many IMLA colleagues who have already reserved their seats at the event.

As this month's ListServ guest contributor, Kelly Butler, City Attorney of Madison Alabama Attorney's office reminds us, the practice of municipal law is not always well understood or appreciated by our constituents. But acclaim has rarely been cited as the motivation for a career in municipal law.

It is more likely related to that defining "Moment" Kelly describes, when a municipal lawyer's judgment, experience and professionalism are called upon to protect and advance the community in exigent circumstances.

IMLA is honored to represent you and to help play a role in your service to community and country every day, and particularly in times of crisis. ML

