

Wm. T. (Bill) Robinson III
President, American Bar Association
House of Delegates Midyear Meeting Address
February 6, 2012

- Thank you to our co-chairs David Bienvenu, Judy Perry Martinez, and Harry Hardin.
- As an Association, we are only as strong as our members.
- So I want to offer my personal thanks to each of you for attending this Midyear Meeting and for your commitment to the ABA.
- Speakers will tell you later about the state of our Association, but I will focus on one topic.
- It is the most pressing issue facing the legal profession today.
- It has the potential to harm clients, slow our nation's economic recovery, and undermine our liberty.
- The crisis of state court underfunding is a threat to our system of justice and what we respect and value as an Association.
- As you know, my predecessor—Steve Zack—had the vision and foresight to create the Task Force on Preservation of the Justice System in 2010 and to put ABA Medal award winners David Boies and Ted Olson at the helm.
- Working with the invaluable Mary McQueen and the National Center on State Courts, we know that in the past year:
 - 42 states have reduced their court budgets
 - 39 states have suspended filling clerk vacancies
 - 34 states have laid off court staff
 - 23 states have reduced courthouse operating hours

- In fact, most states devote less than 3 percent and no states more than 4 percent of their entire state operating budgets to judiciaries
 - In some states, individual executive level departments receive more funding than the state judiciary, and we're talking about one of three co-equal branches of government.
- I won't spend time here describing how negatively this crisis affects the judiciary and the public.
- Instead, let us show you the message the ABA is sharing with America.
- [COURT FUNDING VIDEO PLAYS]
- This video is just a starting point.
- We need to educate the public, business leaders, and legislators about the disastrous path we are on.
 - That is why the ABA has recently sent tool kits to hundreds of state and local bar leaders and judges.
 - The organized bar **and jurists are very effective representatives for getting out** our message.
 - Our kits include this video you've just seen and another video based on the National Symposium held at the University of Ky. College of Law, Sept. 23-24, 2011 plus stories and statistics from around the country, a sample editorial, and tip sheets for making a difference.
 - We've also created a new online resource with updated information, commentary, and video about how our courts are coping with financially withered budgets.

- In addition to placing a steady stream of editorials in the national press, we are reaching out to lawyers at the local level.
 - At Bar association meetings across the country, we have heard stories about courtroom doors slowly closing in front of those who need them.
 - Already, 27 state and local bar publications have made room for our special message about court funding in their jurisdiction and across our country.
 - The response has been very encouraging, and it is clear that lawyers and bar leaders across this great country are ready to do our part as Officers of the Court.
- The ABA is also building bridges to involve civic and business associations that care deeply about our nation's justice system.
 - We have invited unprecedented, high profile partners—the Chamber of Commerce, the Association for Corporate Counsel, and The Federalist Society to name a few—and each has joined us to publicly stand up and speak out for our judiciaries.
- As we look ahead, we can be proud that the next President of the ABA—Laurel Bellows— and her successor as of yesterday, Jim Silkenat - have already pledged to continue our Task Force for the Preservation of the Justice System and to use their formidable speaking skills on behalf of increased funding for our Courts.
- And right now, we are organizing what will be another powerful, public event in support of our Courts.

- The theme and title of Law Day 2012 is the message we have taken from N.Y. to California:
 - “No Courts. No Justice. No Freedom.”
- An invitation has already been extended to our friends in State and Local Bars, asking them to hold a major public event on or around Law Day on the steps of their state capitol—or where they think most appropriate—to highlight the need for more adequate funding of our courts.
- An adequately funded, independent Court system is the key to Constitutional Democracy.
- Constitutional Democracy is the key to freedom. Our liberty depends on it!
- For over 200 years, men and women have sacrificed and, yes, even died so that we can be free.
- For ALL of us as lawyers, as Officers of the Court, as Judges and as the American Bar Association—now is the time to stand up and speak out for our Courts. Otherwise,
 - **“No Courts. No Justice. No Freedom.”**
- This country can be sure that the ABA will never stop standing up and speaking out for our courts. Upward and onward in 2012.
- Thank you.