



## DIVERSITY

BRUCE BEESLEY, PRESIDENT, STATE BAR OF NEVADA

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I was struck by a recent photo of bank executives leaving a meeting with President Obama. All of them were Caucasian middle-aged men. This picture is, unfortunately, largely emblematic of the legal profession in Nevada. Approximately 88 percent of all lawyers in Nevada, including myself, are Caucasian. We are not bad people: we love our families, work hard, pay our taxes, participate in our communities and are good citizens. We, however, are not reflective of the society in which we live. Recent demographic information from the U.S. Census shows Nevada as 74.7 percent white, 24.3 percent Hispanic, 7.3 percent African-American, 5.9 percent Asian, 1.2 percent Native American and Alaska Native, and 0.5 percent Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander.

It’s an unfortunate truth: compared to other professions, minorities continue to be underrepresented in the legal profession. According to the ABA Commission on Racial and Ethnic Diversity in the Profession, fewer than 3 percent of law firm partners belong to minority groups, and minority representation among general counsel in the Fortune 500 is only 2.8 percent.

I believe a diverse membership makes the bar association stronger. The more perspectives and points of view we garner, the more information we have. The more information we have, the better understanding we have. The better our understanding, the better our decisions.



I know that many bar members and many law firms actively support increased diversity in our profession. I, however, want to recognize one member in particular.

We are fortunate to have, as one of our members, a leader in the effort to better diversify our profession: Phil Kohn. Phil is the Clark County Public Defender. When he took over the office in 2004, the office had very little ethnic, geographic or gender diversity. He made it a priority to change that. He successfully pursued relationships with law schools that emphasize diversity: Georgetown University, Howard University, New York University, University of Arizona, American University, Northwestern University and University of California at Berkeley. When he interviews minority students, he gives them his personal attention and advice, sometimes spending hours with a student.

The result? Sixty percent of the attorneys who have accepted positions with the office since Phil began his efforts are minorities, including women.

If you, like me, think we can benefit from better diversity in our ranks, we have a ready-made resource in Phil Kohn. He may not spend the same hours with you that he spends with prospective applicants, but it only takes a few minutes with Phil to know it is worthwhile to have a more diverse workforce. **NL**

State Bar of Nevada  
**MISSION**

Our mission is to govern the legal profession, to serve our members, and to protect the public interest.