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Voting Begins for Next President-Elect of the State Bar of Texas

Lawyers begin voting today to decide whether Lisa Blue or Randy Sorrels will become the next president-elect of the State Bar of Texas. Lawyers...

By **Angela Morris** | April 02, 2018

Lawyers begin voting today to decide whether Lisa Blue or Randy Sorrels will become the next president-elect of the State Bar of Texas.

Lawyers have 30 days to cast their ballots, and the winner of election will serve as president-elect for one year, starting this summer, and then become state bar president in June 2019.

Sorrels, managing partner of Abraham, Watkins, Nichols, Sorrels, Agosto & Aziz in Houston, said that Blue's campaign has attacked the bar extensively, while he's tried to keep positive.



“Just like every organization, the bar has things that need to be fixed; it has things that need to be improved, and good programs that need to be enhanced. What we really need is fresh ideas to proactively help lawyers,” said Sorrels.

Blue, partner in Barron and Blue in Dallas, said she wouldn’t use the word “attack” to describe her campaigning.

“I would use the word ‘reform,’” she said. “The most important thing for lawyers is keep our right to vote, and one of my top priorities is get back all our right to vote on dues and discipline. The bar is going the other way. The bar has not been a platform of transparency. My campaign is not negative: my campaign is how to reform it so it’s more open.”

Texas Lawyer previously reported that the Texas Legislature’s 2017 Sunset bill made changes to the state bar. The Sunset Advisory Commission, which periodically reviews state agencies and recommends changes to lawmakers, had suggested eliminating the referendum process in which lawyers vote on disciplinary rule changes. In the end, lawmakers kept referendums (<https://www.law.com/texaslawyer/almID/1202787948691/state-bar-of-texas-bill-approved-by-legislature/>), with changes to the rule-making process.

Also, lawmakers changed the State Bar Act to allow the state bar to increase lawyer dues, without a referendum, if the increase is less than 10 percent and occurs no more frequently than every six years.

“There is no proposed dues increase in this year’s budget and none expected in upcoming years,” said bar spokeswoman Amy Starnes, who noted the bar hasn’t increased dues in 28 years.

The state bar on March 27 emailed Texas lawyers final statements from both candidates.

Blue wrote in her statement that an “insiders cult” has negatively impacted the state bar because it’s been run as a private club to benefit insiders, which has hurt regular lawyers. As an example, Blue wrote about the Sunset bill’s changes.

“I’ll fight to restore our full voting rights,” she wrote. “I’ll join the effort of President-elect Joe Longley and other bar reformers to have an open and transparent bar.”

She wrote she would make the bar fiscally prudent by reducing its budget, improving its fiscal security and enabling lawyers to opt-in to receiving the Texas Bar Journal digitally rather than printed. Blue wrote, among other things, that she would increase the bar’s transparency by live-streaming board and committee meetings, and stopping the bar’s use of the Texas Public Information Act’s discretionary exceptions to refuse to produce documents requested by the public.

Sorrels wrote in his March 27 message to lawyers that he’s focused on new programs that would help lawyers and run the state bar like a business. He included a list of 11 goals that he would work to pursue if he became president-elect.

He said in an interview that among his top three most important goals would be working with lawmakers and the Texas Supreme Court on a “Statewide Courthouse Access Security Badge.”

Currently, some counties allow lawyers to go through a background check process and pay for a badge that allows them to skip courthouse security checkpoints, which saves time and money for both lawyer and client. But if a lawyer practices in multiple counties, he must submit to a background check and pay a fee for a badge in each county.

Sorrels’ proposal would create a state bar program to provide just one in-depth background check and one badge that would allow lawyers to skip security at all of the courthouses in Texas. It will require legislation and supreme court approval, he noted.

Another of Sorrels' top-three proposals wouldn't require legislation. He said he wants for the state bar to create "the Texas Lawyers' Briefcase," which would be a digital repository of motions, pleadings, briefs and other filings. A lawyer could submit his own documents into the system, which would index them for easy searching by other lawyers. A lawyer who found something in the system might use it as a form, or he might decide to hire the attorney who drafted it. The system would be free to use.

Sorrels also said lawyers are wasting time and money trying to learn each separate Texas county's unique e-filing policies and procedures. All of Texas needs a consistent e-filing routine that will save lawyers the time and trouble of figuring out each county's nuanced system, he said.

Blue and Sorrels both started out as petition candidates, using a mechanism in state law allowing any lawyer to get on the ballot if they collect about 5,000 signatures from Texas lawyers. However, the state bar later chose them as board-nominated candidates, because other nominees weren't interested in running (<https://www.law.com/texaslawyer/sites/texaslawyer/2017/11/22/state-bar-subcommittee-recommends-president-elect-nominees/>), since Blue and Sorrels had the advantage of a head start.

Blue said in an interview that she did finish collecting her 5,000 signatures anyways.

Later, the bar board of directors set a (<https://www.law.com/texaslawyer/sites/texaslawyer/2018/01/29/state-bar-board-approves-time-limit-for-candidates-to-collect-petition-signatures/>) 180-day (<https://www.law.com/texaslawyer/sites/texaslawyer/2018/01/29/state-bar-board-approves-time-limit-for-candidates-to-collect-petition-signatures/>) time limit on collecting signatures (<https://www.law.com/texaslawyer/sites/texaslawyer/2018/01/29/state-bar-board-approves-time-limit-for-candidates-to-collect-petition-signatures/>)—meaning that

petitioning would last between September and March—to try to give bar-chosen candidates and petition candidates the same amount of time to campaign. The bar now will pick board-nominated candidates in September instead of January of each year.

Bar President-elect Joe Longley, who was the bar's first successful petition candidate, said the rule change was a form of "candidate suppression." Current bar President Tom Vick countered that the changes would ensure that board-nominated and petition candidates get the same amount of time to campaign

(<https://www.law.com/texaslawyer/sites/texaslawyer/2018/02/08/letter-to-the-editor-the-texas-state-bar-is-committed-to-conducting-fair-elections/>).

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