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LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

2004 was a very special year for me and my family. In August 2004, I was elected to the NCBE Board of Trustees, filling the vacancy of outgoing board member and past chair Jequita Harmon Napoli. However, I was unable to attend the first board meeting in Halifax, Nova Scotia, because my 29-year-old daughter, Nancy, had recently received a heart/liver transplant at Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota. While I fleetingly considered whether this was really the best time to take on another responsibility, my favorite motto is “When the going gets tough, the tough get going.” Therefore, I followed my heart, which relished a serious assignment, particularly in the world of bar examining.

After graduating from the University of North Dakota School of Law in 1980 and clerking for a year with Eighth Circuit Judge Myron Bright in Fargo, North Dakota, I began grading essay exams for the North Dakota Bar Board, as it was then called—a name that created confusion about whether the board licensed drinking institutions or lawyers. In 1991, the North Dakota Supreme Court appointed me as the first woman member of the three-member board, which was later renamed the North Dakota Board of Law Examiners. I served as chair of the board for 13 years until my term ended in 2007. While I no longer graded bar exams, I did continue to prepare, select, and edit essay questions and regraded questions on appeal. Probably because of my recognition of my own deficiencies as a drafter and editor, I encouraged the board to take a serious look at the Multistate Essay Examination (MEE). Within a year, the North Dakota Supreme Court agreed with our recommendation to test applicants using both the MEE and the Multistate Performance Test (MPT).

As a member of the North Dakota Board, I regularly attended the NCBE annual conferences. Those ambitious programs inspired me to think globally about a bar examiner’s role not only in protecting the public but also in educating our licensees about the professional and ethical demands of being an attorney. Hoping that I could contribute to the work of NCBE, I wrote to Erica Moeser expressing my interest in serving on an NCBE committee. Eventually, I was appointed to serve on the Technology Committee and later

the MEE Policy Committee. However, I never dreamed of the possibility of becoming a member of the NCBE Board of Trustees, particularly since I came from such a small, and often considered remote, jurisdiction.

Therefore, I was very surprised and flattered in 2004 when I received a call from Jequita asking if I would agree to serve. While I am sure I hesitated for a second, thinking about the demands of my daughter's recovery, I was reassured to hear that board membership involved a 10-year training period before one became the chair. Unfortunately, my internship was cut short by the untimely deaths of board members Erias Hyman from the District of Columbia and John Oliver from Missouri and the retirement of Marcia Mengel from Ohio. We continue to miss their wisdom and leadership.

Nevertheless, I feel "ready to go" in assuming my duties as chair. My confidence lies in the groundwork that has been laid by recent chairs Fred Yu, Sam Hanson, and Phil Madden; my trust in the judgment of the current board members; and my reliance on the committed and professional NCBE staff guided by Erica Moeser. The competency of the NCBE staff was highlighted at the August 2011 annual meeting of NCBE and the Council of Bar Admission Administrators in Boulder, Colorado. In the joint programming on Best Practices in Test Administration, Kellie Early and Beth Donahue walked the participants through an exquisite demonstration of the hands-on processes used by NCBE staff in resolving gridding errors and discrepancies on the MBE in order to match answer sheets. While the level of care taken by NCBE was reassuring, it led



to a fertile exchange with administrators on improvements that can be made to the processes by working together.

At the chair's dinner on Saturday, I congratulated Phil on his successful year as chair of the NCBE Board, which included the launching of a content validity study to accumulate evidence of test validity and the implementation of the Uniform Bar Exam (UBE). In 2011, the UBE became a reality in the states of Missouri, North Dakota, and

Alabama. Idaho is committed to using the UBE in 2012, and Washington in 2013, with hopefully many more states to follow. This is a change I will continue to promote, believing that our applicants deserve a portable score that is as reliable and fair as possible. We will continue our UBE discussions by meeting in St. Louis this September with states along or near the Mississippi River. The conference has been aptly named the Big River Conference.

I'm ready to go and hope you are too. We have important things to accomplish. I look forward to seeing many of you at the NCBE Annual Bar Admissions Conference in Savannah, Georgia, on April 19-22, 2012. 📅

Best regards to all.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rebecca S. Thiem".

Rebecca S. Thiem