

Dear Fellow Bankruptcy Section Members:

I want to start off by saying what a privilege and honor it is to be the Chair of the Bankruptcy Section. My hope for this year is that I can continue to move the Bankruptcy Section forward in meeting many of its aspirations in providing quality educational opportunities to its members, pro bono representation to debtors through legal aid organizations and law school clinics and encouragement and learning opportunities to young lawyers interested in the practice of bankruptcy law. Given the support of the wonderful council members that I have the pleasure to work with and the great members of this section, I know that the Bankruptcy Section can achieve these goals and many others.

Before I go any further, it might be helpful for those who don't know me to get better acquainted with how I got to be Chair of the Bankruptcy Section. While I was a second year law student at Pepperdine University School of Law, I was able to secure two externships in the United States Bankruptcy Court for the Central District of California, first with the Hon. Arthur M. Greenwald and then with the Hon. Kathleen T. Lax. This was my first experience with bankruptcy law. As the assistant to the law clerk, I reviewed pleadings, drafted memos to the Judges about the issues in the case and ultimately sat down with the Judges to discuss my rationale for the proposed findings of fact and conclusions of law. It was a great learning experience and helped me secure my first real job as law clerk to the Hon. Ronald B. King, United States Bankruptcy Judge for the Western District of Texas.

As most law clerks will tell you, supporting the Judge provides numerous opportunities to learn about both consumer and commercial bankruptcy practice. In my mind, bankruptcy law is an attempt to avoid the chaos that ensues when an individual or business is no longer financially able to meet their debt obligations. As I have learned over the last twenty years, deciding to file for bankruptcy protection is never an easy choice. For many people, the thought of filing for bankruptcy protection is akin to saying I failed as an adult. I learned from Judge King that compassion and humor during the course of a bankruptcy case goes a long way in reaching a positive result for all participants in the bankruptcy process.

After my year with Judge King, I was able to join Cox Smith in San Antonio, Texas. Even though we had a small bankruptcy department, we were involved in many large commercial cases, so I was exposed early and often to intelligent sophisticated lawyers that I could model in my practice of law. As part of my learning the business of law, I was encouraged to become part of various organizations. One of my first experiences with the Bankruptcy Section was when I was voluntold to help the Hon. Christopher Mott and Mark Andrews to organize and run the Elliott Cup competition.

Next thing I know, I am the Vice President of Law School Relations, running the Elliott Cup for ten years. It was an honor to work with law students from all over the Fifth Circuit in learning and appreciating bankruptcy law. Many law students went from the Elliott Cup into the chambers of Texas Bankruptcy Judges as law clerks. I was glad to play my part in guiding this part of the Bankruptcy Section mission.

In addition to directing the Elliott Cup, I have been involved in several other parts of the Bankruptcy Section mission. I've taught high school students about budgeting through the Moneywise Program and worked on planning committees for conferences. Recently, I was able to successfully file my first Chapter 7 consumer bankruptcy case in conjunction with the St. Mary's School of Law pro bono project.

So while I am not uniquely qualified to be the Chair of the Bankruptcy Section, I do understand the many objectives that the Bankruptcy Section is trying meet. As I look forward to a great year as the Chair, I encourage everyone to get involved in participating as a member of the Bankruptcy Section. Join one of the live online CLE events, teach a Moneywise class, take a pro bono case through the law school pro bono projects, be an Elliott Cup Judge.

If there is anything that the Bankruptcy Section can do better, please do not hesitate to contact me. I want to do everything I can to make sure the Bankruptcy Section is meeting all of its objectives.

Thomas Rice
Chair, State Bar of Texas Bankruptcy Law Section