

**Jane Pierson**

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**From:** Theresa Nangle Obermeyer [tobermeyer@gci.net]  
**Sent:** Friday, January 30, 2009 3:30 PM  
**To:** Jane Pierson  
**Subject:** Response to Alaska Bar Association Audit #41-20057-08

1/6/09

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**Alaska Legislative Audit #41-20057-08 Alaska Bar Association Sunset June 30, 2009 recommends Alaska Bar Association extension. The Audit is online at <http://www.legaudit.state.ak.us/pages/digests/2008/20057dig.htm>**

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**ALASKA BAR ASSOCIATION SHOULD BE SUNSET JUNE 30, 2009** during Alaska 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Statehood year for the foreseeable future while Alaska Legislature has time to analyze the two essential functions of admissions and discipline. Alaska has unique circumstances as the only state without a law school or any elected attorney. Legislative Audit #41-20057-08 is a "white wash." Sunset should be reevaluated by 26<sup>th</sup> Alaska Legislature 2<sup>nd</sup> Session. Please review the "Summary" of the Audit "four objectives of our report" including the termination date extension of Board of Governors Alaska Bar Association (Board), whether the Board is operating in the public interest, to determine if the Board has exercised appropriate oversight of licensed attorneys, and to provide current status on the recommendations made in the prior report. Board of Governors Alaska Bar Association demonstrate none of these objectives at the present time. Ms. Patricia Davidson, Alaska Legislative Auditor, is unable to write the essence of the lack of accountability of Alaska Bar Association as she is a public employee without legal recourse. Alaska Bar Association Audit is the most important of all the State of Alaska Audits done because if any other Alaska professional has a problem with licensure in his/her profession, the applicant must hire a licensed Alaska attorney in order to appeal. Only Alaska Legislature can create accountability of Alaska Bar Association. Major issues follow:

### **1. American and Alaskan Jurisprudence**

Please specifically review Page 19 of Alaska Bar Association Audit #41-20057-08. Article I Section 3 of the Alaska Bar Association Bylaws sets out the purposes of the Alaska Bar which are:

"1. To cultivate and advance the SCIENCE OF JURISPRUDENCE." (Emphasis added.) "Jurisprudence is the philosophy of the law or science . . . which has for its function to ascertain the principles on which legal rules are based . . . (in order to) produce the greatest advantage to the community" according to Black's Law Dictionary. Please see "In Re Obermeyer II

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8/23/00" and In the Matter of the Application of Thomas S. Obermeyer 717 Pacific Reporter 2d 382, 57 American Law Reports 4<sup>th</sup> 1195 (Alaska 4/18/86), both of which can be found at <http://www.state.ak.us/courts> "Appellate Courts" "Alaska Case Law Precedent since 1960," Thomson-West page, "By Party Name" "Obermeyer." THESE CASES ARE AMERICAN AND ALASKAN JURISPRUDENCE.

## **2. Alaska Bar Association Admission by Reciprocity Gives More Rights to Out of State Attorneys than Alaska Attorneys**

The current Alaska Bar Rules of Alaska Bar Association give an Alaska law license to any applicant by reciprocity if he/she has been licensed by written Bar Exam in the 33 of 50 reciprocal states, pays \$1,500, and gets three letters from clients in the preceding state that the applicant has practiced law there for 5 out of the last 7 years. Alaska Active Out of State attorneys number over 18% of the Total Alaska attorneys or 530 out of 2,938 per Todd Communications Alaska Directory of Attorneys Fall, 2008 Page 2. **July, 2006-June, 2008 per the "Audit" Page 31, 45% of Alaska Bar Association admission has been by reciprocity – most of whom have never set foot on Alaska soil judging by their current addresses.** Why do these out of state applicants want reciprocity here? Obviously, these attorneys are making money off Alaska. Another almost 30% of Alaska In State Active Attorneys work for the Government per Directory Spring, 2008 Page 64.

Alaska Bar Exam, "a test of minimal competency," has an average 63% passage rate July, 2006-June, 2008 per Page 31 of the Audit. Alaska has as high requirements as any state in the U.S. for sitting for this Alaska Bar Exam but presumably has the lowest passage rate of the 50 states of Bar Association applicants, all of whom went to American Bar Association accredited law schools.

If 45% of Alaska Bar admissions currently are by reciprocity to those who overwhelmingly are not Alaska residents, what will the number be if Alaska Legislature goes along with the Audit recommendation and continues Alaska Bar Association without review until June 30, 2017 or eight long years?

## **3. Current licensure by exam or reciprocity does not assure competence, ethical behavior, protection, or service to the public. Board of Governors Alaska Bar Association (Board) offers no alternatives.**

Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court has allowed a Massachusetts Bar applicant who graduated from an on-line law school owned by testing-prep company, Kaplan, Inc., to sit for Massachusetts Bar Exam. See Ross E. Mitchell vs. Board of Bar Examiners, SJC-10157, September 3, 2008 – November 20, 2008. The applicant was allowed to take and pass the California Bar Exam, a state which allows applicants to sit for this Exam from unaccredited law schools. What does this tell the Alaska public about bar exams? About competency to practice? About ethics? About dealing with clients, peers, and the courts in a timely and courteous way? If the practice of law boils down to one exam, one score on one sheet of paper, does it truly protect the public and inspire confidence, when a legal education was acquired at whatever rate of speed on-line? Mr. Mitchell has made both Alaska's licensure practices and American Bar Association accredited law schools' three years of Socratic Method teaching archaic. At Alaska Statehood 1959 and after, some attorneys and judges obtained Alaska law licenses by clerking for the court without having gone to law school at all. The on-line law degree points out that there are alternatives to practice that Alaska Bar Association is unwilling to visit.

Unlike all the other 49 states, Alaska Bar Association Board of Governors offers no alternative methods of admission like a possible clerkship at a law firm or for a judge, even after the Alaska Bar applicant has faithfully obtained American Bar Association 3 year law school education. Furthermore, the Alaska Bar Rule 2.2(b)(3) disallows admission by reciprocity if applicants have failed Alaska Bar Exam in the last five years even if licensed by written Bar Exam in a reciprocal state. This harms Alaska residents who live and work in Alaska and only highlights the unfairness of reciprocity applicants from 33 states who have never sat for the Alaska Bar Exam simply paying

\$1,500 to be licensed here. On point is Ms. Marla Greenstein, who as Executive Director, Alaska Commission of Judicial Conduct since 1982, was admitted by reciprocity in 1997 without having ever taken the Alaska Bar Exam. There are others including Ms. Angela O'Brien, licensed by reciprocity on September 30, 2008, who live in Alaska but have not taken Alaska Bar Exam. Alaskans currently would be fools to take Alaska Bar Exam with our low passage rate by going through our established Alaska Bar Association channels. The shrewd approach is to circumvent Alaska Bar Exam and become licensed in Alaska by reciprocity which is easier. Ms. Greenstein, Ms. O'Brien, and the others only had to have been licensed by written Bar Exam in a state that has reciprocity with Alaska and presumably proved in some perfunctory way that they had practiced five of seven years in their state of previous admission.

By contrast, Thomas S. Obermeyer, Alaska resident for 30 years and Attorney, licensed since 1990 by similar Missouri Bar Exam, a state that presumably has reciprocity with Alaska, has dedicated himself in good faith having paid for, studied for, and taken Alaska Bar Exam 34 times most recently "failed" on October 30, 2008 over an almost 25 year period in an effort to create fair Alaska law licensure. Tom has only chosen to go through the established process to obtain his Alaska law license and begin with his legal career. The lack of assistance given to Tom Obermeyer over such a long period of time shows how outrageously unfairly one Alaska Bar applicant could have been treated while seemingly everyone else is given favorable treatment.

#### **4. Fairness to Alaska Bar Applicants for Admission**

Please review attached "Draft Bill Authorizing Admission of Reciprocal Applicants to Alaska Bar Association" which can be downloaded at <http://www.tobermeyer.info/pdfs/26thAKLeg1stSess2009.pdf> and the precedent, "Laws of Alaska 1966 HB 520 Chapter 144 An Act-Authorizing the Department of Labor to enter into reciprocal agreements with other states regarding wage claims; and providing for an effective date," that can be downloaded at <http://www.tobermeyer.info/pdfs/LawsofAK.pdf>. The current practice of Board of Governors Alaska Bar Association penalizes local licensed attorneys who are admitted by Bar Exam in the 33 reciprocal states. "DRAFT Bill Authorizing Admission of Reciprocal Applicants to Alaska Bar Association" would change this practice that currently gives more rights to attorneys who have never landed on Alaska soil. Do Alaskans want those from other states to have more rights than we have? Does the "DRAFT Bill" protect the Alaska public?

#### **5. The current Financial Position, Revenue, and Expense statements of Alaska Bar Association are jumbled and combined to confuse and hide actual expenses in the "ivory tower" Atwood Building #1900 in Anchorage.**

The Audit fails to delineate details of operating expenses and personnel assigned to each activity, and it fails to list salaries of Executive Director, Bar Counsel, other attorneys and staff. RESULT: THE QUASI-GOVERNMENTAL ALASKA BAR ASSOCIATION HAS NO GOVERNMENTAL SUPERVISION. Auditor Patricia Davidson did not so much as discuss the details of Alaska Bar Association Operating Budget information in her Appendices. The salaries and travel of the Alaska staff attorneys of Alaska Bar Association especially Ms. Deborah O'Regan and Mr. Stephen Van Goor, who have been employed at Alaska Bar Association since 1980 and whose salaries the Obermeyers have been paying since 1984, are not included. **By contrast, when bills authorizing governmental activity are introduced in Alaska Legislature, attached are fiscal notes with personnel costs.**

**The Alaska Supreme Court should take over the Alaska Bar Association as a governmental body for the foreseeable future.**

#### **Admissions**

If Alaska Supreme Court administers both exams and admission by reciprocity, there would be better communication between Alaska Bar Association Board of Governors and the Court, fewer

admissions by reciprocity, more fairness and alternative options for admissions, better treatment of Alaska applicants, and more public trust. This would be an interim solution that should be tried for a year at a time with analysis by Alaska Legislature to see if it is working.

Alaska State Court justices/judges should be more fully scrutinized as well. I will update <http://www.tobermeyer.info/asj.html> which shows Alaska justices/judges got 50% salary increases per CSSB237 in 2006. Another increase was implemented by 25<sup>th</sup> Alaska Legislative 2<sup>nd</sup> Session SCS CSHB 417(FIN) Section 20 (a) (b) and (c). Research should be undertaken to analyze how many State of Alaska justice/judges are appropriate based on Alaska population and Alaska Bar Association membership. At the moment, becoming Alaska State Court justice/judge is much more coveted than actively practicing law as an Alaska attorney advocate. There is "Alaska Judicial Retirement System" through Alaska Retirement Management Board under Alaska Department of Revenue. Is there Alaska Judicial Retirement System Board? There should be more analysis of our Alaska State Court justices/judges by Alaska Legislature.

### **Discipline**

Ms. Davidson indicates that discipline should be controlled by Alaska Supreme Court. Suspensions and disbarments are already submitted to the Supreme Court, but complete supervision of discipline should be imposed by the court. In many states there is a separate Office of the Disciplinary Counsel with a separate Board.

In the Alaska Bar Audit there is no discussion of "Citizen Complaints" against Alaska attorneys to Alaska Bar Association. The reader is expected to believe that there are no Alaska citizen initiated complaints at all to Alaska Bar Association. I have direct experience in this area per <http://www.tobermeyer.info/pdfs/VanGoor41505.pdf> about the lack of any discipline whatsoever at Alaska Bar Association regarding the 30 lengthy complaints that I filed at Alaska Bar Association 1993-2003. I would be pleased to produce the three boxes of comprehensive timely stamped filings with lengthy transcripts of my 30 complaints against licensed Alaska attorneys which resulted in my worse treatment by more Alaska attorneys. In other words, I am positive today that every complaint I filed was used against me.

Regarding Alaska Attorney "Discipline Function" per Page 3 of the Audit, I am aware that very high profile Alaska attorneys who have been convicted in courts of law of criminal offenses after pleading "No Contest" have not been disciplined by Alaska Bar Association including Mr. Robert C. Ely and Mr. Mitchell Gravo. Former Alaska Attorney General Gregg Renkes resigned February 5, 2005 over a highly publicized conflict of interest but was never disciplined. He is a licensed Alaska Active Out of State attorney today. I have observed Board of Governors "throwing the book" at a handful of unknown Alaska attorneys in private practice whose ethical lapses are grave but these attorneys do not have criminal convictions from a court of law. I have not observed any semblance of consistency in "Attorney Discipline" for sanctions for similar offenses. All are approved by Alaska Supreme Court which is ultimately responsible for equitable fairness and justice in the practice of law.

The current discipline procedures of Alaska Bar Association are probably a primary reason why Alaska has the highest number of government attorneys in the U.S. in addition to the fact the Alaska attorney government employment is exceedingly lucrative offering excellent benefits and outstanding retirement packages. Alaska Legislature should get the salaries and benefits packages for the 576 or more State of Alaska attorneys out of a total 705 including State of Alaska, Municipal, and U.S. Government attorneys. State of Alaska attorneys are 82% of the total of all Alaska In State Government attorneys. In Spring, 2008 30% of the total of 2,395 Alaska In State attorneys were employed by the Government according to Todd Communications Alaska Directory of Attorneys. Fall, 2008 stopped publishing the number which probably exceeds 30% at this time.

### **Continuing Legal Education**

So far, voluntary CLE in Alaska has been a farce. Regarding "Findings and Recommendations" of Audit #41-20057-08, no specific recommendation was made about how many hours of Mandatory Continuing Legal Education (MCLE) should be required for practicing Alaska attorneys. Ms. Davidson wrote on Page 7 of the "Audit" that 41 of the 50 states have MCLE. To date, 3 clock hours of Mandatory Ethics Continuing Legal Education (MECLE) began on January 1, 2008 and "has teeth" in that there are sanctions for non-compliance to be imposed after January 1, 2009 per Alaska Supreme Court Order No. 1640. Alaska Legislature should ask for a full report on how the newly concluded December 31, 2008 MECLE went. To my knowledge, all other professions in Alaska have much longer and expensive mandatory requirements for continuing licensure. Alaska Bar Association should do so as well. At least twelve hours of mandatory MCLE would improve the profession greatly in Alaska. It would also assure collegiality among lawyers and impose a sense of purpose and ethical public service. Ethics training is important but most attorneys know right from wrong long before they deviate from the norm.

I follow actively Alaska Bar Association activities and this Audit is the first I have known that a "Bar CLE Committee consisting of 15 members assists CLE director" Page 19 exists. What I know is that Ms. Barbara Armstrong, CLE Director since about 1980, was President, American Continuing Legal Education Association, about 10 years ago when Alaska Bar did not require Continuing Legal Education and many years prior to January 1, 2008 MECLE three clock hours implementation.

There is a Law Related Education (LRE) Committee of Alaska Bar Association which to my knowledge only gives money to K-12 education. I applied for three grants including "Keep the Kids in School Initiative Anchorage School District," "Alaska Permanent Fund Board Confirmation Committee," and "Fair Alaska Law Licensure" on January 10, 2007 to Ms. Barbara Hood, Alaska Teaching Justice Network. All were rejected by Ms. Barbara A. Jones, Chair, LRE Committee on January 31, 2007. In 2008 I was unable to find out when the LRE grant applications were due. I intend to apply again by January 16, 2009 but will be applying to Ms. Deborah O'Regan, Executive Director, instead of the Chair, LRE Committee. Ms. O'Regan is in control of the entire process.

Ethics Reform was presumably implemented in 25<sup>th</sup> Alaska Legislature 1<sup>st</sup> Session. There can be no Ethics Reform unless Alaska Bar Association is improved. I filed Complaint AGO File No. 661-08-0157 in September, 2007 which was a paper copy of Alaska Permanent Fund Board Confirmation Committee per <http://www.apfboardconfirmation.org> to Ms. Julia Bockmon, State of Alaska Attorney General's Office, requesting an investigation. Instead, I got a letter dated November 30, 2007 from Ms. Bockman copying Mr. Michael J. Burns, Attorney who has never attempted to be licensed to practice law in Alaska, former Chair, University of Alaska Board of Regents, and current Executive Director, Alaska Permanent Fund, stating "Further statements regarding the existence of your complaint or our investigation may result in penalties for violation of the Executive Branch Ethics Act." In other words, I was threatened with economic sanctions for filing the complaint.

## **Conclusion**

Alaska Bar Association offices and personnel should become a State of Alaska governmental agency under direct supervision of Alaska Supreme Court with annual governmental budgets subject to Alaska Legislative scrutiny for the immediate future. This decision should be subject to review yearly.

Alaska Legislative Audit #41-20057-08 does little to dig into the details of the operation of the Alaska Bar Association. The Audit does not recognize that Alaska Bar Association fails in several of its intended purposes as stated on Page 19 because Alaska Bar has the benefit of governmental protection without direct daily governmental oversight. Alaska Bar does not advance jurisprudence and justice; increase public service and efficiency of the bar; promote reform in the law and procedure; or mandate substantive legal education. The Audit proposes more public notice and participation of public in teleconference meetings but the public is afraid of Alaska Bar so public

notice and participation of the public in teleconferences will have no effect. Nothing could serve the public more than to make Alaska Bar functions a matter of total government control. Are the employees of the Alaska Bar Association staff, Bar Counsel, Executive Director, etc., the beneficiaries of State retirement and medical benefits? This should have been explained fully in the Audit but is not addressed.

Public participation currently is discouraged at all levels. When my husband, Thomas Obermeyer, Missouri Attorney since 1990, appeared before the Senate Judiciary Committee in May, 2007 regarding sunset of the Alaska Bar Association, he was the only person to appear. Bar Counsel Stephen Van Goor was on line by teleconference. When Tom asked for time to contradict Mr. Van Goor's statements, Hollis French, still current Alaska State Senate Judiciary Chair, cut him off. The minutes of the meeting were never transcribed. Would anyone be more articulate than Tom Obermeyer who had in 2007 weathered 23 years and 30 Alaska Bar Exam "failures?" This was the same Hollis French who as a State of Alaska Prosecutor charged and prosecuted me in State of Alaska/Hilton Anchorage vs. Theresa Nangle Obermeyer 3AN-S98-2211 CR for over nine months until I was acquitted in a seven day jury trial on November 10, 1998. How much did that cost?

In my case, I have been defamed endlessly by Alaska corrupt media which is about 95% owned in many Lower 48 states because I continue to believe that I have a right to attend a public meeting. I was jailed over night in a set-up orchestrated by Ms. O'Regan and Mr. Van Goor when Board of Governors was at court on January 15, 1999. If a person dares to go to an advertised "public meeting," he/she is made to look foolish and is targeted. I have lived this fact for many years. Governor Sarah Palin nominated me December 2, 2008 <http://www.tobermeyer.info/pdfs/fbresponse.pdf> for a position as a "Public Member" Board of Governors Alaska Bar Association. I hope that I will be appointed.

Alaska Bar Association has the best of both worlds – private and quasi-governmental. Currently, Alaska Supreme Court "rubber stamps" admissions and discipline actions and no Alaska State Agency oversees the Board's operations. This has to change. Alaska Bar dues are among the highest in the nation because Alaska attorneys do not want any competition. The Board allows the employees to lavish themselves with high salaries, travel, and plush offices as long as competition is limited. Alaska Active Out of State attorneys are very weak and totally depend on the handful of local Alaska attorneys who control everything that goes on in Alaska. Substantive truth and real numbers never surface.

This document is meant to create much more discussion about Alaska Bench and Bar. Alaska Legislature must send a strong message to Alaska Bar Association that "the light of day" will shine on its totally unaccountable practices that hurt all Alaskans.