

Congressman Mike McIntyre

Liberty Bell Award

North Carolina Bar Association

Raleigh, NC

Law Day 2020

Many thanks to Leila Hicks, the Liberty Bell Awards Committee, the Law Day Committee and the Young Lawyers Division of North Carolina Bar Association for this special honor!

My life has been impacted by so many who have received this award – both directly and indirectly. Of particular note is the late, great Senator Sam Ervin, Jr. When I eagerly went to find and meet him on a free afternoon when I was attending a high school leadership conference, the Washington Workshops Congressional Seminar, in the summer of 1973, I wandered to the Senate side of Capitol Hill and was told he was conducting a hearing called “Watergate”. I ended up standing in the back of the hearing room on the day that John Dean, who was counsel to the President, testified against his boss – and that was the beginning of the end of the Nixon White House.

That event had such a profound effect upon me that while others were talking about how dirty and corrupt politics were, I felt led to go into public service for the opposite reason – to make a positive difference in the lives of our citizens.

The next summer, in 1974, I returned to Capitol Hill as an intern for my representative, Congressman Charlie Rose, and that was the summer that Nixon resigned. I still remember thinking as I left Washington that summer that maybe one day I would have a chance to go back to

Washington and make a difference. I decided to major in political science as I headed to UNC that fall.

It was only three summers later that I had the opportunity to intern for Judge Robert Browning, who loved the law and had a strong sense of fairness. My experience with him would impact my decision to go to law school, and later he received this award while I was in Congress.

Judge Earl Britt and Judge Herbert Richardson—both from my native Robeson County, UNC President Bill Friday and former Governor Jim Hunt, as well as my friends, former Chief Justice Mark Martin and NC Court of Appeals Chief Judge Linda McGee—all have inspired my life at key times, and all are recipients of the Liberty Bell Award.

This award is especially meaningful because of the fact that it is bestowed by the young lawyers of our Bar Association, who represent the next generation of leadership in the legal community. I remember the opportunities that the NC Bar Association gave me as a young lawyer. And it was during those early years that my career was shaped by my involvement in working with students and teachers in the classroom and other lawyers in the community to inspire citizenship education and foster a better understanding of our legal system and a greater appreciation of responsible citizenship and civic engagement.

I still remember during my first year of practicing law when I went to the head of the law firm for which I was working and saying that we needed to be involved in the classroom, working with our teachers to help students better understand the law and civic responsibility. The head of our firm was Bruce Huggins, who had presented me for admission to the Bar and who—this many years later—is now President of the Senior Lawyers Division of our Bar Association. At the time Bruce said, “That’s a great idea, Mike. Why don’t you go and do it?” And so, off I went,

working with the five school systems which were in our county at the time.

A lawyer's leadership translates into being not only an officer of the court, but also an example in the community. Citizenship education is extremely important – as I realized when our teachers needed help in the classroom. This is why I started the Citizenship Education Committee for the Robeson County Bar and worked on improving civic understanding on the state and national levels as well. Whether it's through the ABA, the NC Bar Association, our local bar or through volunteering in the schools, writing lesson plans, emphasizing the importance of our Constitution, or participating in Law Day, we can help produce more responsible, better-educated citizens!

When I have volunteered in the classroom, I have encouraged students to practice what I call “the three R's of good citizenship”:

Rights, Responsibility and Respect!

—Stand up for your rights;

—Fulfill your responsibilities; and

—You will earn respect!

If we keep our rights balanced with our responsibilities, then respect will be earned, and we will all be better citizens!

It is important that we as attorneys are not only accountable in our professional responsibilities, but also in our moral obligation and civic duty to help students and citizens in the larger community understand the key principles of law, justice and fairness and the ways in which each one of us can contribute to the betterment of our communities, state and nation.

Hosting the Youth Leadership Summit for every public and private high school in my Congressional district, as well as teaching my “Classroom from Congress on Citizenship” at schools across our region, allowed our

efforts to flourish. After I completed my service in Congress, my wife, Dee, encouraged me to continue my passion of helping young people, which I had done ever since I first started practicing law in my hometown of Lumberton in 1981. Thus, the McIntyre Youth Leadership Challenge was established, modeled after the Youth Leadership Summit we had done while I was in office.

I am thrilled that this Youth Leadership Challenge is now part of our statewide Law Day activities through the Bar Foundation. I am also grateful that the Political Science Department at UNC has used this as a template for a freshman class on public service. It is my hope that it will light a fire in young people to demonstrate how they can carry the torch forward and challenge themselves and others to discover new solutions to the problems our communities face.

Many of these activities in which I have been blessed to be involved have become ways to inspire, excite and ignite the next generation of leaders—not only in our legal community, but also in our state and nation. The North Carolina Bar Association and the Young Lawyers Division have been part of my legal heritage from the very beginning of my law career right up through this very moment. My hope is that we all will pursue the principles of good citizenship, civic engagement and dynamic leadership for generations to come!

As Robert Kennedy said to his brother John when he was considering a run for President, “If not us, who? If not now, when?”

Thank you again for this great honor, and may God’s blessings be with you and with our state and nation always!