



## A Wild and Wacky Year!



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As you may recall, my theme for 2017 was “Be Ready ... Be Ready for Anything!” At the 2016 Annual Meeting of the Delegate Assembly, I spoke about ASWB focusing on developing the ability to adapt to rapid change and surprising events and building capacity for resilience. I stated that ASWB had evolved into a complex, mature, and influential organization, qualities that would position us to “Be Ready!”

Well, I must say that those words were prophetic because 2017 definitely proved to be a year that challenged us all. I would like to reflect with you on the events of the past 12 months and the effect of these events on our collective organizations.

You may recognize these words from Dickens’s *A Tale of Two Cities*:

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times. ... In short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, ..., in the superlative degree of comparison only. (1859)

I submit that 158 years later, this aptly describes the year we have been living. This year was challenging, sad, and somewhat shocking on many levels. We have witnessed current events, many

of which can be described as disasters—natural disasters, human disasters, and policy challenges. These current events touched us as regulators in ways that we did not anticipate.

The powerful floods in Texas, Louisiana, Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico; the raging fires in the Northwest, California, Alberta, and British Columbia; all of these natural disasters brought devastating human and economic losses to people—many who are social workers or regulators.

The human disasters include the devastating riots in Charlottesville, Virginia; mass shootings in Las Vegas, Nevada; and so many babies killed at the First Baptist Church in Texas. This violence against people and communities was committed by angry individuals, or individuals suffering with mental illness, or—more frightening—organized hate groups. We are hearing stories of increasing numbers of refugees fleeing to safety from Syria and entering Canada. As more victims find their voices and come forward, we are hearing stories of sexual assault and harassment, especially in the workplace.

We can look to the public policies related to these natural and human disasters—policies that were in place and those that were not in

place. To bring it closer to home, I ask you as regulators to reflect on the policies and procedures related to your current regulations and how your organizations were impacted by these disasters, as well as the threats to social work regulation that have been emerging at a much higher intensity than before.

Recently, the Massachusetts and Florida administrators reached out to ASWB to help them deal with the influx into their jurisdictions of displaced social workers from Puerto Rico. These licensed social workers landed gratefully and safely in their new communities with their families, but they also brought their sincere desire to continue practicing their beloved profession. However, the social workers had no verified paperwork; the boards had no objective information regarding the licensing requirements in Puerto Rico; and neither could get any information from the island.

ASWB obtained regulatory information that supported the administrators to help them determine acceptable, workable processes to accommodate their new citizens.

The Texas, Louisiana, Oregon, and California boards worked closely with ASWB Exam Administration and Pearson VUE to reschedule multiple exams for social workers whose homes or workplaces were swept away, burned, or severely damaged during the floods and wildfires. Licensed social workers who are first responders traveled across jurisdictional lines to Las Vegas and Texas and were able to assist rescue efforts and provide crisis services to victims because of regulatory provisions of the licensing boards.

Here are examples of recent social work regulatory threats that exemplify the worst of times:

1. Forced consolidation of social work boards with allied professions under the guise of increased efficiency and effectiveness (e.g., Kentucky, Kansas, Arkansas, Ohio)
2. Elimination of or strict limitations on occupational licensing and licensing boards (e.g., Arizona, Wisconsin, Idaho)
3. Sunset review threats for social work, psychology, and human medicine in Texas

In balance, though, here are examples of social work regulatory advances that exemplify the best of times:

1. Actively reviewing and updating social work legislation and regulation in Missouri, Georgia, Virginia
2. Delaware successfully advocating for additional license categories and Pennsylvania enacting multiple license categories
3. North Dakota advocating laws and regulations that more closely mirror the ASWB Model Social Work Practice Act

Throughout 2017, as regulators, we have had to defend and promote our beliefs about regulation, protection of the public, and the importance regulating social work practice. Many of you, particularly, new board members, became involved in legislative advocacy for the first time because of these threats.

Now, let's look at two national policy threats: occupational licensing reform and anti-trust issues.

Most of you know that ASWB's investment in the Federation of Associations of Regulatory Boards (FARB) has been long-standing, and FARB's recent advocacy initiatives benefit the regulation of social work and our ASWB members.

ASWB submitted written comments and attended the two Economic Liberty Task Force roundtable meetings on occupational licensing reform hosted by the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) in Washington, D.C. The FTC is taking the perspective that occupational licensing creates unnecessary barriers to access to jobs and, as of now, does not share our contention that social work regulation is a public protection issue. ASWB wrote, "Regulation can seem onerous for some occupations; however, for health care-related professions—including social work—it is a necessity." We also informed the task force of social work's Mobility Strategy and stated that "one solution will not fit all professions."

With anti-trust issues, there has been a major concern that "regular folks" will be frightened away from serving on regulatory boards due to the possibility of being personally sued. ASWB and FARB have been active partners with other regulated professions, such as medicine, nursing, and psychology, to sponsor and support a soon-to-be-proposed local government anti-trust act legislation that will extend immunity to members of licensing boards and prohibit monetary damages against state boards or agencies.

So, my generative question to all of us is: How do we lead during these unusual, confounding, and challenging times?

We cannot be beaten down, become discouraged or complacent, and check out. Neither can we become so aggressive/angry that we contribute to the divisiveness, hatred, and shutting out of others that might prevent us from solving the problems facing us.

Here is what I think.

I think an important answer is unlocking the full potential in all our organizations by practicing values-driven leadership and solution-focused thinking. We do this by understanding our common goals and living our shared sense of purpose as regulators. Using the resources of ASWB, FARB, and other like-minded regulatory organizations, we tell our story of protection of the public, common sense regulation, and an informed public.

We also insist on civility and solution-focused thinking in our organizations and in other organizations that we collaborate with, such as the social work professional associations and the social work education organizations in Canada and the United States. This will free us from succumbing to the divisiveness and resentful negativity that is prominent today.

We know that any crisis or disaster can also present the best opportunity for transformative change. At ASWB, we will engage the right people, encourage each other to stay at the table long enough to figure it out, and then issue a call to action to implement agreed-upon solutions.

In 2018, I am anticipating another active year as we begin the strategic planning process that will culminate in presenting a vibrant three-year plan at the Annual Meeting of the Delegate Assembly. I urge us all to stay engaged, keep informed, be ready for anything, and ANTICIPATE!