

# NYSBA takes its lobbying efforts to Washington, D.C.



**NYSBA goes to Washington**—From left, President-elect Michael Miller, President Sharon Stern Gerstman, Sandraw Rivera and Hilary F. Jochmans stand in front of the nation's Capitol. [Photo courtesy of Michael Miller].

By Michael Miller

NYSBA's voice rang out through the halls of power in our nation's Capitol on February 14, as NYSBA's legislative lobby team spent the day meeting with key members of New York's Congressional delegation and their staffs.

The group included NYSBA President Sharon Stern Gerstman; Committee on Federal Legislative Priorities Chair Hilary F. Jochmans; Committee on State Legislative Policy Chair Sandra Rivera; and me, along with Director of Governmental Relations Ronald Kennedy Deputy General Counsel Kevin Kerwin.

Our lobbying this year focused on preserving and enhancing funding for the Legal Services Corporation (LSC); opposition to federal regulation of the tort system, and specifically the proposed \$250,000 cap on pain and suffering in malpractice cases; and opposition to the Infrastructure Expansion Act of 2017, which would effectively overrule the section of New York State's Labor Law that imposes absolute liability on property owners and contractors for falls and

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elevation-related injuries suffered by workers.

Additionally, we asked the senators and representatives with whom we met to sign a letter to their colleagues supporting Legal Services Corporation funding.

The budget recently proposed by the Trump administration proposes complete elimination of funding for the Legal Services Corporation, which is the largest funding mechanism of civil legal aid for low-income Americans in the entire nation.

Among the local entities that rely upon funding from LSC is the Legal Aid Society of Mid-New York, Inc. in Utica, which provides critically important legal services to low and middle-income families and individuals across Central New York. We were pleased that most of the representatives we met with, Republican and Democrat alike, recognized the

importance of restoring funding for legal services.

We were greeted especially warmly by Congresswoman Nydia Velázquez, who represents parts of New York City. We had a substantive discussion with her about the state of affairs in Washington, relations between Congress and the White House, and prospects for legislative progress. She was enthusiastic about the prospect of NYSBA sections and committees assisting her in the review of proposed legislation.

These periodic lobbying trips are important because they allow us to have direct dialogues with members of New York's Congressional Delegation regarding matters of concern to our association and its members. These efforts help ensure that NYSBA's voice remains strong, relevant and effective.

Miller is president-elect of NYSBA.



**State of national affairs**—NYSBA President-elect Michael Miller, right, meets with Congresswoman Nydia Velázquez, who represents parts of New York City. [Photo courtesy of Michael Miller].



**Direct dialogue**—State Bar President-elect Michael Miller, right, meets with Congressman Lee M. Zeldin, who represents the 1st District of New York, during a recent lobbying trip to Washington, D.C. [Photo courtesy of Michael Miller]