

Welcoming the 111th President of The Mississippi Bar



W. Briggs Hopson, III
Vicksburg, Mississippi

Briggs is a partner in the law firm of Teller, Hassell & Hopson, LLP. A graduate of the University of Mississippi (B.B.A.-1987; J.D.-1990), he practiced with firms in New Orleans and Gulfport before returning to his childhood home of Vicksburg in 1996. He is a former adjunct professor at Mississippi College School of Law. Briggs serves in the Mississippi State Senate, representing Warren, Issaquena and Yazoo counties.

Q. What type of practice do you have?

A. My law firm is an “old fashioned” general practice. We handle almost any type of civil matter and some of my partners occasionally handle a criminal matter. I work primarily in the fields of litigation, school law, business, commercial practice, and a few other areas. I still have my Louisiana license and occasionally will handle a case in that state.

Q. How did you become involved in the MS Bar?

A. As a young lawyer, I served with the former Client Relations Committee and in the Young Lawyers Division. I also attended several Bar conventions where I got to meet other lawyers around the state and stay connected with Bar activities. I would encourage all lawyers, young and old, to stay connected to *your* Bar. We want to provide services that will assist you in your practice and give you opportunities to serve our profession in a broad effort to promote excellence in the administration of justice in our state.

Q. Tell us about your family?

A. I have a wonderful immediate family and extended family. I could talk for hours about my wonderful and supportive family, but I will stick to the basics. My wife, Ali, and I have been married for nearly 21 years and we have three children. Ali is a strong spiritual presence in all of our lives and she is very thoughtful and compassionate. She also makes sure that the children and I are headed in the right direction. She is a breast cancer survivor and has served as an inspiration for many others in our community and elsewhere. My oldest son, Liam, is a freshman at Ole Miss. Walt is a junior in high school, and Jane is an 8th grader. They are all good students, friendly

and outgoing children. I am blessed also to have wonderful parents, siblings, and in-laws.

Q. Who have been your greatest influences in your life, personally and professionally?

A. First my father, Briggs Hopson, Jr. I have always admired my dad for his commitment to God, his hard work, and his compassion for others. He is a retired surgeon who always set a wonderful example for his children by the way he treated people with dignity and respect. Another thing I admired about him is that he provided medical care in our community to so many people who often times could not afford to pay. He simply wanted to make sure that they received the best care possible and that they were healed. The other person who influenced me greatly is my former law partner, Landy Teller. As many readers of this article may know, Landy died recently in April 2016. But, he left a huge legacy for me and my law partners. Landy constantly reminded all of us in the firm and others in the legal community about the critical importance of legal counseling and our obligation to maintain high levels of civility and professionalism. He was the perfect example of what a lawyer should be. Two things, among many, that my father and Landy had in common were that neither one ever stressed the motivation of money in their respective professions; and, that they were peacemakers, always looking for a reasonable solution to any problem.

Q. What would you be doing if you had not gone to law school?

A. I suppose that I would have gone into banking. In fact, I

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majored in banking and finance at Ole Miss. Even after being accepted to law school, I continued to interview with banks for permanent jobs. I received a job offer from a bank in Nashville. I was very close to accepting the job and declining my acceptance to law school. I called my father and told him about this and he asked if I eventually wanted to go to law school. When I said yes, he strongly encouraged me to continue my studies in law school because he knew that it would be difficult for me to come back to law school once I started earning a salary. It was some of the best advice I ever received.

Q. When did you first become a legislator, and what prompted you to seek office?

A. I was encouraged by some local citizens to run for legislative office a few years before I decided to run for State Senate in 2007. I have always enjoyed public service, but did not think about running for office until then. I felt like, and still believe, that Mississippi has great potential. It will take thoughtful, forward-thinking decisions to make the kind of positive changes that will have a lasting impact.

Q. How do you balance the time between practicing law, being a legislator, and your family?

A. That is a challenge, especially during the last 6-8 weeks of the legislative session. As I mentioned earlier, I have a very supportive family that even allows me to serve in the legislature. I have a great law firm that is helpful in making sure that there are no “loose ends” in my law practice. I work hard to schedule legal matters wisely, and I work a lot of weekends and late nights during the session. Somehow I manage to make most of my childrens’ school and sporting events. Nothing disappoints me more than to miss one of their activities.

Q. Not that you probably have much, but what do you do in your free time?

A. Free time – what is that? Seriously, I enjoy running, cycling, and golfing with friends. I also enjoy going to high school and college sporting events.

Q. Being a legislator and an attorney you are in a unique position to see the challenges and opportunities our state and citizenry face. From your viewpoint, what do you see as our greatest challenges, and, conversely, what are our opportunities?

A. I could spend a lot of time talking about this, but I think the one big challenge for the Bar and the legislature is that of access to the legal system. I am grateful for the wonderful work that groups like the Mississippi Volunteer Lawyers Project, the Access to Justice Commission and other legal-services organizations perform to afford underprivileged and impoverished citizens legal representation and access to our courts. We must continue to work on this. Another challenge is improving our educational system. We have to look at innovative programs that are making differences in the lives of students. We must be willing to go beyond the barriers that some want to establish in order to improve over our system of education. Because of our inadequacies in these two areas, we have much room for growth. So, I see these as two tremendous opportunities for our State.

Briggs and Ali with their children Liam, Walt, and Jane.



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Q. As you have viewed the profession both as a practitioner and through your involvement with the MS Bar, how do you feel practice has changed?

A. I think the practice has changed noticeably in two significant areas. First, I believe that there are fewer trials than when I began practicing in 1990. More cases seem to settle (which is not altogether bad), and other disputes are resolved without ever litigating. Second, I think our attorneys actually exhibit greater professionalism, civility and courtesy than when I first began to practice. Sure, I know that there are some lawyers who do not exhibit these traits, but I sincerely believe that, as a whole, professionalism is improving in the Mississippi Bar. By the way, I attribute some of this to the professionalism programs sponsored by the Bar and the emphasis placed by our judges, leading practitioners, and others that “Rambo-style lawyering” is not the way to practice.

Q. What do you see as a great challenge for the practice of law in Mississippi in the coming years?

A. There is an intensive review taking place as to how many lawyers society needs. There are a few factors that must be considered. One is that we are fast approaching the time when the baby-boomer lawyers will begin to retire. So, there is some concern that there may not be enough lawyers to meet the needs of all the citizens. Additionally, there are still problems with many of our citizens getting access to the courts. Oddly, fewer law students are getting good jobs after graduation and many believe that the market is over-saturated. Some

attribute the lack of demand for “good-paying” legal work to the proliferation of companies that provide forms or “cookie-cutter” advice for a nominal fee. Others contend that litigation is being replaced by alternative resolution markets. Whatever the reason, demand for new lawyers is down. Law schools have adapted to this trend by accepting fewer students. I am not sure if this will continue, but this is certainly something we will need to monitor carefully to make sure that we do not have too many lawyers in our state but have enough to meet the needs of our citizens.

Q. What is your vision or platform for your year as President of the Mississippi Bar?

A. Although I did not consider this necessarily a “vision” or “platform”, I think there are a few things that I would like to promote this year as President of the Mississippi Bar. First, I want to remind all of the members that the mission of the Bar is to promote excellence in our profession and in the administration of justice. Second, I want to challenge members to offer themselves in public service. Finally, I want to remind our members of the importance of understanding technology in their law practice. Specifically, we, as members of the Bar, need to understand our obligations to the courts and our clients. We should also utilize technology in managing our law offices and our practice. This includes ensuring that we are protected from cyber-security attacks and other threats to our personal data and that of our clients. ■

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