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A Young Lawyer Unveils His Political Agenda

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Michael D. Goldfarb, a commercial litigation associate at Murtha Cullina in Hartford, loves following politics. When he joined the executive committee of the Connecticut Bar Association's Young Lawyers Section a couple of years ago, he wanted to bring his passion for politics to the young lawyers at large.

So last year, he became the section's director of government relations and set about creating an event series called "Conversations with the Government." During the series, prominent members of government address and mingle with the state's young lawyers.

"It's a new position, and in many ways, [the YLS] created it for me because of my interest in politics," Goldfarb said. "I wanted to get more people involved in a dialogue with these political figures."

A legislative breakfast had long been a YLS event, but Goldfarb "wanted to build upon that and expand to the other branches of government."

For his work in bringing together attorneys and political leaders, Goldfarb earned the "Star of the Year Award" from the YLS for his service to the bar. He was one of about a half-dozen young lawyers around the state who were recognized in late June for various contributions.

"These programs were well-attended," Goldfarb said. "This is definitely something that our members want more of."

Goldfarb's practice at Murtha Cullina includes a niche in elections law, and he's had close ties to some important political cases in recent history both as an attorney and, before that, as a judicial clerk to Connecticut Supreme Court Justice Peter T. Zarella.

He was a judicial clerk when the state Supreme Court heard cases regarding a campaign finance dispute involving Republican gubernatorial candidate Tom Foley in 2010 as well as the 2010 case in which Secretary of the State Susan Bysiewicz was declared ineligible for the attorney general's race because she had too little experience in the active practice of law.

At Murtha Cullina, Goldfarb worked with partner Francis J. Brady defending current Attorney General George Jepsen when Jepsen's eligibility for office was challenged by Republican candidate Martha Dean, who claimed tht Jepsen had too little litigation experience.

Those interactions and connections served Goldfarb well when he assembled his speakers lineup over the past year that included Zarella, Gov. Dannel P. Malloy, and House Minority Leader Lawrence F. Cafero, R-Norwalk.

Zarella touched on separation of powers issues and how state budget cuts affect the Judicial Branch's ability to do its job. Malloy discussed his legislative agenda and what goes into his decision-making when he appoints judges to the bench. Cafero spoke about death penalty legislation and legislative redistricting in the state. "I think it's great for young lawyers to be able to connect with these people," Goldfarb said. "They're all very approachable."

Bar Set High

As part of Malloy's appearance, Christopher Drake, who is deputy legal counsel to Malloy, also participated.

"I thought it would be inspiring for members to hear from a young lawyer in the Malloy administration," Goldfarb said. "This gave members access to the governor, which generally would not happen."

Heading into his second year as YLS government relations director, Goldfarb knows he needs to maintain the standards he has created for his events.

"I kind of set the bar quite high, and I don't know how I'll get better speakers than we had this year," he said with a laugh. But he's working on next year's series already, with an eye on featuring Jepsen; Andrew J. McDonald, who is chief legal counsel for Malloy; and a panel of judges to discuss career options for young lawyers.

"You don't just wake up at age 55 and decide you want to be a judge," Goldfarb said. "For those who think that's a goal they want to attain, the event would show them what they need to be doing now to become a judge."

Goldfarb noted that this type of program offering reinforces the importance of young lawyers to stay connected with their bar association.

"I'm trying to create exclusive events for members to interact with high-ranking officials," Goldfarb said. "You can't find these events anywhere else." •



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