



Photos by Jeff Lyons

Rhonda Hill Wilson (left photo, from left) and A. Charles Peruto Jr. are joined by moderator Lynn Doyle and panelists Sayde J. Ladov (right photo) and Tariq El-Shabazz.

Panelists Tackle Hottest Cases of 2009

■ By Mary T. Kranzfelder

CONTROVERSY SURROUNDING LUZERNE County judges, state Sen. Vince Fumo's trial, the death of Michael Jackson, the Eagles' signing of Michael Vick and the decision to hold the 9/11 trials in Manhattan have stirred up debate among legal analysts and news commentators over the past year. A Dec. 1 Chancellor's Forum was held to debate and discuss these "hot topics" of 2009 featuring

Sayde J. Ladov in her last forum as Chancellor, Rhonda Hill Wilson, A. Charles Peruto Jr. and Tariq El-Shabazz. The panel was moderated by Lynn Doyle of the Comcast Network and sponsored by the Bar-News Media Committee.

Debate surrounding the Luzerne County scandal began with the assertion that, although the accused judges have yet to be tried or enter a guilty plea, those involved sold their offices and diminished the stature of the Luzerne bench.

The panel considered using the situation as an opportunity for oversight of the judicial system. Recommended changes involved the removal of politics from the judicial process by doing away with judicial elections and instead choosing judges by appointment, and revisiting the concept of judicial immunity as perhaps being outdated. Ideas for restitution to the juveniles who received unwarranted jail sentences included the opportunity for higher education, mental and physical healthcare and monetary compensation.

Discussion then turned to the Fumo trial and whether the high number of counts brought against Fumo was justified or whether it was a grievous exhibition of overcharging by the U.S. attorney. Panelists discussed the public perception that white-collar criminals are treated differently than others charged with crimes.

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From all of us
at Blank Rome,
we congratulate
SCOTT F. COOPER
2010 Chancellor
of the
Philadelphia
Bar Association

We salute your insightful approach to the issues
impacting the legal profession and your
commitment to the Philadelphia Bar Association.



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Panelists discussed whether Michael Jackson's death was a homicide or accidental, and how the public's perception of Jackson changed after his death. Although Jackson was once the defendant in a child molestation trial, the public has all but deified him since his death, according to the panel. Debate regarding Michael Vick focused on whether he has paid his dues to society and whether he should be allowed to play in the NFL. Panelists compared Vick's legal troubles and reputation with those of NBA star Kobe Bryant and multiple current NFL players who have been accused of or charged with DUI, domestic abuse, involvement in a homicide and weapons charges.

The most spirited debate arose with the issue of the 9/11 trials being held in a

although the accused judges have yet to be tried or enter a guilty plea, those involved sold their offices and diminished the stature of the Luzerne bench.

Manhattan civilian court versus a military court. Those in favor of a military trial argued that 9/11 was an act of war because a foreign entity was attacking our country and therefore the accused should not be subject to the same rights afforded to those tried in a civilian court. Some panelists argued that the trials should be held in Manhattan, but acknowledged the likelihood that the accused would not receive a fair trial in New York or anywhere else in the United States. The debate ended with the argument that to not try the 9/11 suspects in New York would mean we as Americans do not trust the Constitution we uphold.

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