



One on One with Richard K. Leefe, 73rd LSBA President:

On Service, Involvement and Meeting Challenges as They Arise

Interviewed by Barry H. Grodsky
Louisiana State Bar Association Secretary

Richard K. Leefe, the Louisiana State Bar Association's 73rd president, is a partner in the Metairie firm of Leefe Gibbs Sullivan & Dupré, L.L.C. He received a BS degree in engineering in 1969 from Louisiana State University, his JD degree in 1974 from Loyola University College of Law and later earned an LLM in International Commercial Law from Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen, Scotland. He was admitted to practice in Louisiana in 1974.

He is a Vietnam veteran, serving as a combat engineer officer in the U.S. Army from 1969-71 where he commanded an engineer company in the Mekong Delta. He attended the U.S. Army Engineer Officers School at Fort Belvoir, Va., and is a member of the Military Order of Foreign Wars.

Leefe served as the Louisiana State Bar Association's (LSBA) president-elect in 2012-13 and as secretary and editor of the Louisiana Bar Journal in 2011-12. He served as a member of the LSBA's Board of Governors and is a member of the LSBA Executive Committee. He was the original chair of the LSBA Senior Lawyers Division. He has served or currently serves as a member of the LSBA Rules of Professional Conduct Committee, the Committee on the Profession and the Public Access and Consumer Protection Committee, among others. He is a Louisiana Bar Foundation Fellow, serves on the Board of Directors

of the Louisiana Bar Foundation and the Louisiana State Law Institute, and is a member of the American Bar Association's House of Delegates. He received the LSBA President's Award in 2011.

He taught law school at Loyola University College of Law in New Orleans from 1976-2002, teaching Evidence, NIL and legal research and writing. He also taught American law to Chinese law students at the Huazhong School of Law in Wuhan, China, in 2002, and taught Chinese engineer Ph.D. candidates at the same school in 2009. In 2012, he taught Courtroom Evidence to executive MBA students at Loyola University Business School.

Leefe has handled legal matters in Europe, Africa, Asia and South America, as well as in many states in the United States.

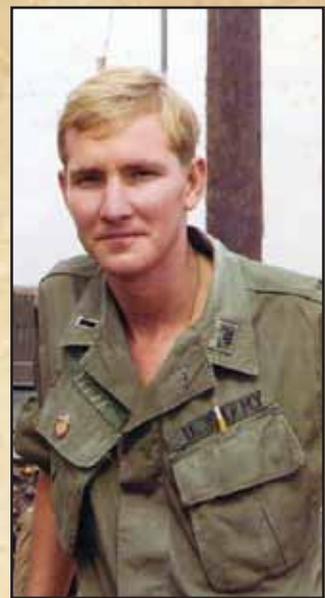
He is the author of the treatise Louisiana Code of Evidence Practice Guide, 3rd edition (2005), published by Lexis Publishing. He also wrote the 1st and 2nd editions in 1990 and 1995. He received the Distinguished Service Award from Loyola University College of Law in 1992, the Excellence in Education Award from Professional Education Systems in 1991 and the LSBA Young Lawyers Section Award of Appreciation in 1991.

He and his wife, Barat, have been married for more than 31 years. He is the father of four children and has six grandchildren.

Richard K. Leefe, 73rd Louisiana State Bar Association president, with his family. Seated from left, his son Eric O. Leefe, his wife Barat Leefe, Mr. Leefe and his daughter Madeleine Barat Leefe. Standing from left, daughters Kibbe Leefe Horne and Katie Leefe Johnston. In front, Teche, "First Puppy of the LSBA." Photo by Loupe Photography & Video.



Richard K. Leefe during his Vietnam service. Photo provided by the Leefe Family.



Richard K. Leefe during the time he taught law in China. Photo provided by the Leefe Family.

Journal: What was your motivation to begin your legal career?

Leefe: Actually, it was reverse motivation. I graduated from LSU in engineering in 1969 and went right into the Army. I went through engineer officers' school, and then went to Vietnam as a combat engineer. Before I left for Vietnam, I realized that the space program was being stepped down. Engineers were pumping gas. PhDs couldn't get jobs. There were just no jobs for engineers; so I thought it would be great to take advantage of the GI Bill when I came back from Vietnam and go to law school. I thought I could get through law school, then go back to being an engineer. But then I got involved in law school, became an editor of the *Law Review* and such. I got a job at a law firm and stayed with law.

Journal: So that ended your aspirations to become an engineer?

Leefe: Not really. Being an engineer is quite a big part of my practice because the combination has led me to a lot of representation I've handled that has been engineering-related matters. I enjoy the combination.

Journal: You are the first Bar president who has actually been a combat veteran, serving in Vietnam. How has that experience affected you?

Leefe: It has a great effect on your whole outlook on life. After you go through that type of experience, you tend to see things differently than before. Whatever happens after that doesn't seem that important and doesn't bother you as much. It caused me to be more relaxed in my practice, but anxious to get things done. I was a company commander and I had 160 young men in my company under my command. The experience of seeing young men do their jobs with bravery and dedication is beyond inspiring. It was a stunning experience. It has to affect you. It makes a major difference in your life. You see the world. You feel closer to your country. These guys were dedicating themselves to doing their jobs, not for credit, not for glory. They were just risking their lives to do what was asked of them and some of them didn't come back.

Journal: You also are the first Bar president to have taught law school in China.

Leefe: Probably so.

Journal: What was that experience like?

Leefe: That was a surprisingly wonderful experience. But I expected it to be a great experience. The perspective of teaching Chinese law students, seniors in a law school in central China . . . seeing and hearing their perspective on issues was quite different and inspiring. They were extremely intelligent, very interested in the United States and in

our law. They had no knowledge of our Constitution and our whole basis of law. I was there to teach them that and to compare Chinese law with American law. One thing that surprised me was they had never been allowed to speak in class. All those years in school and they had never spoken in the classroom . . . until I got there. After three or four days, the dam broke and all this emotion and all these questions came pouring out. The class was three hours every day, five days a week. By the end of the course, I would sit in the middle of class and we would gather and just talk. I was living at a hotel about a mile from the law school and some of the students would meet me coming out of the hotel to be able to walk the mile and ask me questions. After class, many would walk the mile with me back to have more time. Their thirst for knowledge and fascination with the law was amazing. I have to say they could not have been more friendly or accommodating.

Journal: Tell us about your family.

Leefe: I have four wonderful children. My two older girls are married. I have six grandchildren. I have a son who was teaching at Jesuit, but who is going back to working as an engineer. And I have a daughter who is working her way toward medical school. I also have a wonderful wife, Barat, and soon everyone will get to know her. By the way, she is not running for anything, but she is



Barat and Richard K. Leefe at the 2009 LSBA Annual Meeting. Photo by LSBA Staff.



Louisiana State Bar Association President Richard K. Leefe with his wife, children and grandchildren. Front row from left, Abie Horne, Simmons Horne, Barat Leefe, Mr. Leefe, Harper Johnston, Henry Johnston and Lila Johnston. Back row from left, Kibbe Leefe Horne, Miller Horne, Madeleine Leefe, Eric Leefe and Katie Leefe Johnston. In front, Teche. Photo by Loupe Photography & Video.

friends with everybody.

Journal: What was your very first legal job?

Leefe: In law school, I worked at Jones Walker. While there, a partner left to go to another firm and I left to go to that group, Foley Judell. After graduation, I worked at Foley Judell in the corporate division. In 1975, I branched out on my own. Now I am a senior partner in my firm. We are in Metairie and handle a lot of commercial matters and a lot of litigation . . . a very interesting group. I have been fortunate to handle many international matters and have been involved with legal matters on five different continents.

Journal: What was your first job ever?

Leefe: In high school, I worked in the Luzianne Coffee warehouse in New Orleans. I was packing coffee, putting it on the trucks, and anything else.

Journal: Who have been your role models or heroes?

Leefe: Some of you may have seen an ad campaign in New Orleans about my dad. He was a hero of World War II and, several years ago, he was featured in an ad campaign about being a war hero. His picture was on billboards and posters around the city, on TV and on the side of street cars. Until he died (two years ago), they also had him at the New Orleans Hornets basketball games. It was great that, at the end of his life, he was

finally getting some recognition which he really had not sought. He is a hero of mine for many reasons.

Journal: You have practiced law now for awhile and practiced in your own firm since 1975. Can you look back and say there has been a truly memorable case, one that was unforgettable?

Leefe: Actually, there have been several of those cases. I have tried many cases and handled legal matters all around the world, each being a special experience. Once, I was trying a case in Santos, Brazil, when I got a kidney stone and ended up with the Little Sisters of Charity taking care of me. I was able to take my son with me to South Africa on a matter and we ended up going on a photo safari together, which was fantastic. But, ultimately, the case against then-New Orleans DA Eddie Jordan sticks out as memorable. I was one of four attorneys that tried that case; it was great, a very diverse group of lawyers who all worked extremely well together. I got involved in the case with the other attorneys, not with the idea of making money and getting paid, but because there was a wrong done and we thought we were doing the right thing. I think it did work out that way.

Journal: What changes, for better or for worse, have you noticed in the practice of law?

Leefe: Attitude. Professionalism is so much different now than it was. You hear older lawyers talking about it. Back then, the practice was certainly on a handshake. You'd call someone for an extension and there were no questions about it. Lawyers always talked civilly to work cases out. Sadly, there appears to be an attitude by some that you have to be nasty, that you have to abuse the system. That's just wrong. That's one of the things we have to undo. We need to protect professionalism and regain respect for our profession.

Journal: How did you get involved in Bar activities that ultimately led you to a role in Bar leadership?

Leefe: I was minding my own business and practicing law. Then my friend, Wayne Lee, was elected LSBA president. Soon, I received three letters saying I was appointed to three committees. He just appointed me and, certainly, I did everything Wayne asked me to do. It was a really fulfilling experience. I realized you can get involved. You can make a difference. You see things happening. You are working on real issues. Then I served on more committees. Next I ran for a seat on the Board of Governors and won. Then I ran for secretary and won, and then president.

Journal: You have been at the forefront in the development and leadership of the Senior Lawyers Division. What are the goals



John H. Musser IV, Michael A. Patterson, Richard K. Leefe and Stephen I. Dwyer during the 2011 Louisiana State Bar Association orientation. Photo by LSBA Staff.



Richard K. Leefe and Chief Justice Bernette Joshua Johnson during a reception for the Chief Justice's investiture. Photo by Matthew Hinton Photography.

and expectations of the Senior Lawyers Division?

Leefe: Actually, Mike Patterson was the one who thought about creating a senior committee. While he was serving as president, Mike asked me to be involved. I have to give a lot of credit to Mike; he had the vision. The whole idea of the Division is to keep our senior lawyers involved. We are wasting a great asset. The senior lawyers are a source of wisdom, knowledge and experience that we need to use in many ways, such as for the Bar in general and for young lawyers in particular through the mentoring program. We need to keep them involved rather than let them drift away from the practice.

Journal: During your tenure as president-elect, you have worked closely with President John Musser. What have you learned from John about Bar leadership and about your path forward?

Leefe: John is a good leader and very good about addressing the issues. I thank him for his work and help, and I note there have been a string of real leaders since I came to the Board of Governors . . . Guy deLaup, Beth Foote, Kim Boyle, Mike Patterson, Jimmy Davidson . . . all of our former presidents have had individual strengths. It has been incredible to watch their dedication and effort for the Bar. They were all dedicated to doing

the right thing and to addressing issues to make the practice better. I have dealt with many other former presidents, too, going back to Wayne Lee, Frank Neuner, Marta-Ann Schnabel, Mike McKay to mention just a few. They are all good people. My wife and I have noticed that at this level—the House of Delegates, the Board of Governors, Bar officers, on committees—you are dealing with the people who are making a difference. They are involved and doing things . . . just good people doing a good job. Generally, the members of the Bar do not realize the time and effort they have all put into the Bar without compensation.

Journal: You have had a lot of unique experiences in your practice. This is not necessarily a legal issue, but you had the opportunity to give advice to President George H.W. Bush. What was that like?

Leefe: Actually, I have had the occasion to represent three governors and one President of the United States. Those, indeed, were privileges. Each was different, but President Bush 41 had a wonderful, friendly feel that is hard to explain and the public really never knew.

Journal: Will you be calling on former President Bush for help in this position?

Leefe: He is an admirable man. I talked a lot to him about many and varied issues. It

was a great experience for me. I was going to invite him to come to Destin (for the LSBA's Annual Meeting), but his health is not good at the moment. He's a wonderful guy. You can feel his depth of character when you are talking to him one on one.

Journal: What are the challenges facing lawyers today? How can lawyers tap into the Bar's services as tools and assets for their daily practices?

Leefe: There are several challenging issues today. When you do get involved at each level of Bar service—committees, Board of Governors, House of Delegates, officers, president—many things you don't know are coming just come over the hill and hit you in the face, and you have to deal with them. I'm presently dealing with several of these issues. Legal education is one. The concern is that lawyers are coming out of law school unprepared for the practice. This is not new, but it has come more to the forefront now that the economy is bad and many new lawyers are not getting jobs. So many of these young lawyers are hanging out shingles and they may not be ready. Then you see an increase in discipline claims, and other issues arising from this situation. Next, couple that with the other major issue of the failure to fully meet our constitutional obligations by providing indigent defense in criminal cases. And, of course, there are always the



Richard K. Leefe and Michael A. Patterson help with the LSBA 2011 Secret Santa Project at the Louisiana Bar Center. Photo by LSBA Staff.



Richard K. Leefe at the Louisiana Bar Center. Photo by LSBA Staff.

issues of providing adequate access to justice services in civil cases. We are working on a method I've presented at the national level to encourage the young lawyers who don't have jobs to work on indigent defense cases and get the experience they need to learn to become lawyers; as with most jobs, there is no substitute for on-the-job training. Let's put them in the courtroom and pay them to provide, under supervision, the access to justice for people who don't have lawyers. It can be called residency or internship. One of the national law schools is saying it is equivalent to the Teach for America program, but for lawyers providing legal services. I have met with the incoming president-elect of the American Bar Association about these issues. I also was surprised to see a form of this proposal appear in an issue of the *New York Times*. So, the idea is hopefully getting traction on the national level.

Journal: You have served for several years on the Executive Committee. You've been extremely supportive of the Lawyers Assistance Program (LAP). What does it mean for our lawyers and what are the Bar's plans for LAP?

Leefe: I have to give credit to John Musser who has drawn attention to it. John asked me to get involved with the program and I have. It's an incredibly good program. It's the kind of thing we need to do — helping

lawyers, judges and law students with alcohol and drug problems, depression and other addictions. The program is there and we need to get the word out more that it is available. Buddy Stockwell does a great job as the LAP director, but he needs adequate funding. With emphasis from John Musser, the Board of Governors decided that the program is such an important asset and benefit to the Bar, we increased our budget, without increasing members' dues, to give LAP more funds for operation. Buddy Stockwell does a wonderful job, but his budget is not as sufficient as it should be.

Journal: You have expanded one aspect of the Bar Association by travels to Europe. Tell us how the CLE Danube River Cruise came about.

Leefe: I hope people jump on board, not to make a pun. As I said at the House of Delegates meeting, many things you do on a presidential track deal with disasters and crisis management, or running to meetings to address some raging problem. Those are the tough ones. The easy ones are the fun things, like planning trips. When I became president-elect, I looked at options to provide good services to the Bar, in addition to the services like Fastcase, LAP and many others. I looked at a cruise in Alaska, then a cruise out of New Orleans (fortunately, I didn't do that as people would be concerned about drifting

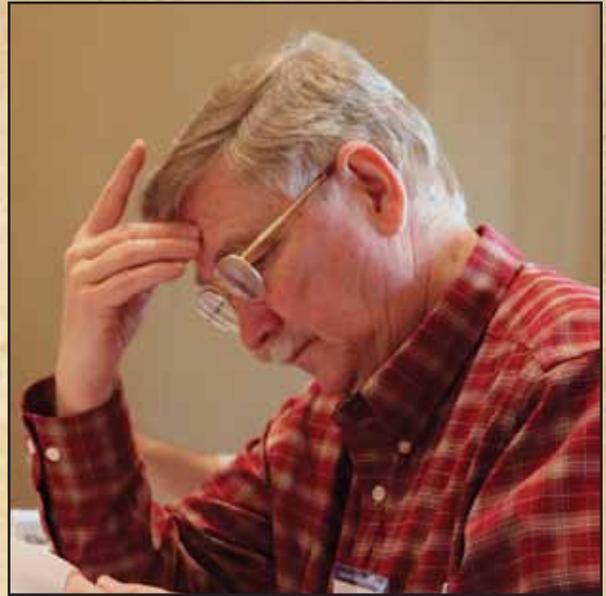
around in the Gulf on a stranded ship). But I settled on a cruise down the Danube River. I decided to offer that trip to the Bar and we received an incredible price (thanks to assistance from LSBA Executive Director Loretta Larsen) at no cost to the LSBA. It is eight amazing days (Sunday, Dec. 8, through Sunday, Dec. 15, 2013) aboard the Viking Longship Skadi, traveling to Austria including Vienna, Germany, Hungary and Slovakia along the Danube River.

Journal: You have established a working relationship with the Bar staff. How important a role does the LSBA staff play in the Bar's activities?

Leefe: It wouldn't happen without the staff. They are handling all the issues every day. When you ask for something to get done, it gets done. It's a wonderful thing and I hope the members of the Bar realize the good work that the staff does. Loretta (Larsen) is fantastic. She does a great job keeping it all going. When you are Bar president, you work most closely with Loretta and she, in turn, works with the staff. Loretta is a real gem that we need to keep in place. She has been wonderful for the Bar and I have found that people around the country realize what a good person we have. Once you are elected as president-elect, you begin your involvement with Bar activities early. In reality, you get to go to the ABA BLI (Bar



Kim M. Boyle and Richard K. Leefe at the new attendee reception during the 2009 Annual Meeting. Photo by Matthew Hinton Photography.



Richard K. Leefe in a quiet moment at the 2009 Board Orientation. Photo by LSBA Staff.

Leadership Institute), a kind of President's School. You get to see it all happening, first involved as president-elect-designate, then as president-elect, before you step into the real shoes.

Journal: I know you are busy, but you have to have time to relax. What do you do?

Leefe: Well, I wrote the *Louisiana Code of Evidence Practice Guide* book published by Lexis. I taught law school at Loyola for 26 years, plus twice going to China to teach and, two years ago, teaching evidence to Executive MBA students—experiences that were hopefully as good for the students as they have been for me. My wife wonders how I do all of this. I don't have a lot of hobbies. I used to play golf and had several sail boats, but there has not been much time for that lately. I just practice law and keep things going. I enjoy it. I have been fortunate to be able to combine the practice with travel and I've seen much of the world while actually getting paid. I have seen six of the Seven Wonders of the World and had occasion to actually go literally around the world.

Journal: Is it important to set specific goals or agendas for your term as president?

Leefe: I thought that when I originally got elected, thinking of things I could do. But, in reality, it comes and hits you in the face whether you like it or not. Issues just come around the corner. For instance, I had just

been elected president-elect when I heard U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts giving a speech about how law schools aren't training lawyers sufficiently and they come out and are not ready to practice and litigate. We're telling the public they're ready and they are not. Then, while I was considering that, I hear that indigent defense has come crashing down and the Orleans Parish Public Defenders' Office is laying off large numbers of attorneys. It's not just a problem of our state; at an ABA meeting, I learned that every state is having the same problems. As I mentioned earlier,

some of the issues come to you. You deal with them as they come and only hope to get to ones you plan out.

Journal: As you step up the ladder, others are coming after you. How do you work with Larry Shea who will follow you as president?

Leefe: Larry will be great. He is very involved. He has a great attitude, and he wants to learn and do a good job. The Board Orientation is important because Larry didn't serve first on the Board of Governors or Executive Committee before, so he has a shorter learning curve. But, no problem,



Barry H. Grodsky interviews Richard K. Leefe at the Louisiana Bar Center. Photo by LSBA Staff.

Larry will be a wonderful president and good for the Bar. Being from Shreveport, Larry is geographically important as well. We need Louisiana to understand that we are not a south-of-Interstate-10 Bar.

Journal: How do you get more lawyers more involved in Bar activities?

Leefe: What concerns me as I have traveled throughout the state is that some of the local bars are really dying. Some local bars are strong, like Baton Rouge, New Orleans and Lafayette. But some local bars are not doing as well as they should. One idea we have discussed is to give members who join local bars (and pay the local bars' dues) credit for attending other LSBA events, like the LSBA's Annual Meeting . . . things that would promote joining local bars. The LSBA is mandatory, but we support the voluntary local bars. I want to show our support.

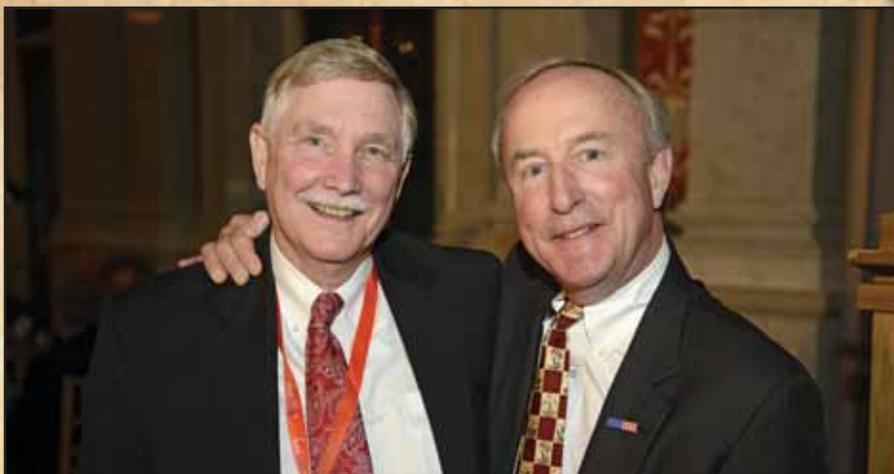
Journal: If you were asked to give a law school commencement address, what would you say to those soon-to-be lawyers?

Leefe: Be professional. It will come to you. If you do your job, if you have studied and work hard, you will be successful. Don't jump out there and file frivolous suits. Don't jump in too fast. Take your time and learn what you're doing. A true professional will be successful. If you push too hard, it will be a problem. Take your time. Learn your trade and begin building your reputation as a professional among lawyers. Don't lose sight of the fact that your reputation is important and you'll be successful.

Journal: If you were not a lawyer, what would you be doing?

Leefe: I'd go back to being an engineer, I guess. It's where I started.

Barry H. Grodsky is the Louisiana State Bar Association's secretary and editor of the Louisiana Bar Journal. He is a partner in the New Orleans firm of Taggart Morton, L.L.C. He received a BBA degree, with honors, in 1979 from the University of Texas-Austin and his JD degree in 1982 from Tulane Law School. Previously, he represented the First Board District on the LSBA's Board of Governors. He chairs the LSBA's Committee on the Profession and has coordinated several law school professionalism programs for the Bar. (Ste. 2100, 1100 Poydras St., New Orleans, LA 70163)



U.S. Rep. Rodney Frelinghuysen (R-N.J.), right, and incoming Louisiana State Bar Association President Richard K. Leefe reunited after 42 years during ABA Day in Washington, D.C. The two men served together during the Vietnam War, with Frelinghuysen assigned as a clerk to Leefe, an officer in charge of the 93rd Engineering Battalion. Photo courtesy of the American Bar Association.

U.S. Congressman and His Army Commander Reunite During ABA Day After 42 Years

Although they hadn't laid eyes on each other in 42 years, U.S. Rep. Rodney Frelinghuysen (R-N.J.) and Louisiana attorney Richard K. Leefe still felt an immediate connection when they reunited in April.

"All of a sudden, he arrived outside my office," Frelinghuysen said. "We had immediate recognition. That was an emotional moment."

Leefe, a founder of the Metairie law firm Leefe, Gibbs, Sullivan & Dupré, L.L.C., and incoming president of the Louisiana State Bar Association, was in Washington, D.C., for the American Bar Association's (ABA) annual lobbying campaign known as "ABA Day." Frelinghuysen was one of six members of Congress who received the ABA's Congressional Justice Award for his work preserving Legal Services Corp. funding in Hurricane Sandy relief legislation.

The two men served together during the Vietnam War, with Frelinghuysen assigned as a clerk to Leefe, an officer in charge of the 93rd Engineering Battalion, which was primarily responsible for building roads in the southern part of Vietnam.

"Rodney and I spent about a month and a half together literally all the time every day," Leefe said.

Despite that short period of time, the pair formed a deep bond. They noted that working so closely together during a war naturally leads to strong friendships because not many people understand the experience.

"Rodney, no matter where I met him, we would have been friends," Leefe said.

Frelinghuysen said he did not know Leefe was in town and planning to visit his office. In fact, Leefe was on Capitol Hill lobbying members of Congress from Louisiana. When Leefe got a break during the day, he made a surprise stop at his old friend's office.

"He came running out, we hugged and it was just like we were there again," Leefe said. "We were instantly bound again as friends."

The men noted it was an interesting coincidence that one had become a lawmaker and the other a prominent lawyer, with both fighting for the same cause.

"It was the strangest thing: He was getting the award for Legal Services [Corp.] and I was there to promote Legal Services [Corp.]. We were exactly on the same side," Leefe said.

He added that he was proud of his friend for becoming a congressman.

"It's pretty amazing. The American Bar Association brought us together," Frelinghuysen said. "I'm so pleased the ABA has prompted this reunion."

The men plan to keep in touch now that they have reconnected. Leefe said he invited the congressman to stay at his home, and Frelinghuysen said he is looking forward to seeing his friend again.

"I think now we will see each other regularly," Leefe said. "We finally got back together."