



## Declaration of Candidacy

Candidates for election as Second Vice President, Secretary-Treasurer, or Director Elected Nationally must complete this form and submit it to the Chief Executive Officer at the principal headquarters of DRI by 5:00 PM (CDT) on July 1<sup>st</sup> of the year in which the election is held.

**National Director Requirements** - Directors Elected Nationally or by Region must be Individual Members of the Corporation admitted to the practice of law. Each such director must meet the following qualifications at the time of election: (a) The candidate shall have been a DRI member for a total of at least five (5) years, and (b) The candidate shall have been a member of at least one DRI substantive law committee for at least three (3) years, and (c) The candidate must have registered for and attended at least one (1) DRI Annual Meeting within the previous three (3) years, and, within the three (3) years prior to the final day of the Annual Meeting, the candidate must have 1) registered for and attended at least two (2) DRI seminars, or 2) registered for and attended one (1) DRI seminar and one (1) DRI Regional Meeting.

Please also see the DRI Board of Director and Officer Competencies, attached.

Position sought:

Second Vice President\*     Secretary- Treasurer     National Director

\*If you have declared your candidacy for Second Vice President and are not the successful candidate, will you consider the Secretary - Treasurer Officer position?

Yes     No

Name Michelle Thurber Czapski

Firm/Company    Bodman PLC

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How long have you been a member of DRI?

23 years

Areas of practice:

**Life, Health, and Disability/ERISA litigation and counselling, insurance coverage litigation and counselling, commercial litigation, financial services litigation, complex litigation and class actions, and I serve as a mediator and arbitrator. I also chair the Litigation Practice Group at Bodman and am a frequent speaker and author on litigation practice, leadership skills and insurance topics.**

Please provide your employment history in chronological order beginning with the current position.

**Bodman PLC, Detroit/Troy, MI: Partner, July 2011 - present**

**Dickinson Wright PLLC, Detroit, MI: Partner, January 1999 - July 2011  
Associate, August 1992 - January 1999  
Summer Associate, May 1991 - August 1991**

Please describe your previous involvement in DRI, including but not limited to, leadership positions held, projects contributed to, committee memberships, presentations given, and written materials authored. Special accomplishments should also be noted.

**Life, Health, and Disability Committee**

- **Chair, October 2022 – October 2024**
- **Vice Chair, October 2020 – October 2022**
- **Program Chair, April 2016**
- **Membership Chair**
- **Marketing Chair**
- **Speaker at many Seminars, Boot Camp, virtual events, etc.**
- **Contributor to numerous publications, including The Voice, For the Defense, and Rescission Compendium**
- **Led effort to win the NFJE Committee Challenge in both 2022 and 2023**

**Commercial Litigation Committee**

- **Chair, October 2017 – October 2019**
- **Vice Chair, October 2015 – October 2017**
- **Class Actions SLG Chair & Vice Chair**
- **Annual Meeting CLE Speaker**
- **Contributor to numerous publications, including The Voice, For the Defense, and Class Action Compendium**

**DRI Membership Committee**

**Center for Law and Public Policy, Legislation and Rules Committee, Class Action Task Force**

**Class Action Seminar Committee**

- Seminar Chair, July 2015
- Steering Committee member for every Class Action seminar
- Seminar Speaker

**NFJE Program Planning Committee**

**I am also a member of the Women in the Law Committee, the Product Liability Committee, and I assisted with the planning of the Strictly Automotive seminar held in Dearborn, Michigan in 2011.**

List any significant leadership commitment and involvement within the legal field other than DRI, including but not limited to other legal organizations.

**DRI has been the main focus of my professional networking efforts for many years. Although I participate in other organizations, such as the Women Lawyers Association of Michigan, the Federal Bar Association, the ICA, and the Oakland County Bar Association, I do not hold leadership positions in any other group.**

Why do you wish to join the board of directors or become an officer and what skills, abilities and attributes identified in the Board of Director/Officer Competencies can you bring to the role?

**I have been quite involved in many aspects of DRI for over two decades and it has benefited me in so many ways, which have varied as I have progressed through my career. As a younger lawyer, I learned so much about my areas of practice, how to be a good lawyer, and how to network. As I matured and grew, I began to realize just how important the connections I made through DRI really are, and I reaped the benefits of having good friends and respected colleagues all over the country and beyond. Meanwhile, I have honed my public speaking, volunteer leadership and organizational skills in ways that firm life does not provide. So, after having chaired two committees and two seminars, I feel that it is time to give back to the organization as a whole and to contribute the value of my experiences to strengthen DRI for the future. I believe my deep understanding of how DRI can enhance the professional lives of its membership—as it has mine—is my greatest strength. The focus of my work as a board member would be to assure that DRI continues to serve its membership to the best of our collective ability so that the next generation can enjoy the benefits of membership as I have.**

What suggestions would you make to move the organization forward?

**I believe that in order to stay relevant, DRI, like every other organization, needs to keep in mind the changes in its member base as it moves toward the future. New lawyers in recent years have brought us a new kind of professional mindset, and they do not necessarily play by our rules. They seem to be less rigid in their thinking, crave flexibility, and value human experiences over lecture. We are seeing in my firm that to lead them, we must lead differently. They do not fear missing their billable hour requirements like we did. They take calls from the dog park. They have interesting thoughts and are finding innovative ways to solve problems. They care, in a different way than we cared when we were in their shoes.**

**Fighting all of this will get us dinosaurs nowhere. Forward movement by any organization that wants a future run by this generation will require an acceptance and understanding of their priorities. This is even more true for an organization, like DRI, that will rely on the volunteer efforts of these folks. So, I think that we should study not just “volunteering psychology” but “Gen Z volunteering psychology” to help us to effectively motivate the youngest of our members and to keep them engaged as they take over for us in the decades to come. They have so much to offer; we need to understand how to harness their talent and to best serve them.**

Describe one transformational/defining experience in your professional life you have been involved with and what you learned from that experience.

**COVID was transformational for all of us. Aside from the obvious human toll it took on our population, it also changed how we as lawyers (like everyone else) do our jobs. It made me realize, at first, that I did not need an office building with lots of copy machines and paper to be an effective attorney. I was plenty able to effectively represent my clients from my home office, writing briefs, taking depositions, and arguing motions (even presenting to DRI groups) without ever leaving home. That experience was both stressful and liberating. I learned how to navigate systems I’d previously left to the “IT folks.” I also learned that my worth as a lawyer does not depend on the number of dusty books I can access at any given time, but instead, it was always about what went on between my ears. And that goes with me everywhere.**

**With time, however, I also realized that there is more to being an attorney than being an effective advocate. I missed the people. The lightning strike of a brainstorming session with my trial team. Laughing until my eyes water over a story told at lunch. A sympathetic eye roll from a kind court clerk. Learning, growing, making new connections, and seeing my friends at networking events and seminars.**

**So, while the “COVID experience” has taught me that my advocacy comes from within, it has also taught me that the true scope of a rewarding practice lies in my interactions with others. This is why getting out of the office and interacting with my colleagues in the bar, especially through DRI, is so important to me.**

Describe the greatest challenges and opportunities that lie ahead for DRI over the next five+ years.

**Continuing with the theme of my two previous answers, DRI is well poised for success in the new post-COVID environment in which we now live. People are back, live, and I believe that many crave the social and educational interaction that professional networking events and seminars provide. DRI has always been the best in the industry at hosting such events, and that has not changed.**

**But, there are other options now, and many prefer them. We can take care of CLE requirements with online webinars and we can meet as committees more often and much more enjoyably with a virtual format than was the case with our previous conference calls. Our publications options are also changing, with more opportunities to publish and read articles of varying lengths in a variety of sources. We can even have hybrid committee fly-in meetings when some folks can’t travel, but still want to participate. And so on.**

**These are great changes, and examples of the flexibility necessary for the health and growth of the organization as the rate of change keeps increasing. I believe that we as an organization need to stay on top of technological change and open to creative options for getting members together and for the delivery of the services they have come to expect from DRI. I believe that the future is bright for DRI because it has shown the ability to pivot during the past few difficult years, and we will surely continue to do so as the future brings the next set of challenges, opportunities, and member preferences.**

DRI strives to be governed by a diverse board of directors—in terms of race, ethnicity, age, gender, religion, sexual orientation, disability, location, and/or professional level, and other facts that enhance diversity and inclusion --- who can and will help advance DRI’s goals through the power of collaboration. In what ways have you demonstrated a commitment to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in your work, and how will your DE&I experience inform your contributions as a Board member?

**As I am fond of telling my associates, I am living, breathing example of diversity. First of all, I am of Maltese descent and most Americans do not even know what that means. Also, I have spent so many years being the only woman at the table in depositions, meetings, and courtrooms—sometimes being called “sweetie,” sometimes being excluded from “man talk”—that**

**attention to diversity (and especially inclusion) is ingrained in my psyche. As I have developed some measure of experience over these past 32 years in the trenches, I have been driven to help younger women, people of color, and other minority demographics to overcome prejudice that might be thrown their way (because it will, still today). For my part, I foster a “zero tolerance” environment for it wherever I have a say in the situation. To that end, I participate in our Mansfield Certification program at Bodman and our Diversity, Equity and Inclusion activities, which are many. As a Practice Group Chair, I lead, recruit and mentor with these principles in mind, always.**

**On the DRI front, as Committee Chair (x2), I have recruited diverse people to serve in steering committee roles whenever possible, to add to the variety of voices in the room. In the early 2000’s, together with Leo Lagomasino and a handful of other LHD women, I helped to establish the Women’s Networking Dinner at our annual seminar. We believe it was the first dinner of its kind. Although there were some that threw us criticism at first, it was wildly successful and now is a mainstay at many other committee seminars, often hosted by the Women in the Law Committee. The LHD Committee also has a tradition of hosting a Diversity Luncheon at our seminars, which have featured some incredible, inspiring speakers. This luncheon has been a group effort over the years, but I am proud to say that I have worked on it and supported it, as both Program Chair and Committee Chair during my time.**

**I will continue to support DE & I if I am selected to serve on the Board of Directors because it is important to me. We are stronger as an organization if we create an environment in which we see, hear, support and celebrate everyone. This effort starts by recognizing talent in all corners of the organization and encouraging folks of all demographics to come forward, because their participation is valued and appreciated.**

Is there anything else you would like to add that has not already been previously stated?

**Thank you for your consideration!**