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Alumni Update

Inside the Beltway

Michael A. Battle '81 takes charge at top Justice Department post

Amid the traffic and tourists of Washington, D.C., Michael A. Battle '81 is settling into a major new job at the right hand of power. Battle, who served for more than three years as U.S. attorney for the Western District of New York, began work June 6 as director of the Executive Office for United States Attorneys, at the Department of Justice. His office oversees the work of 94 U.S. attorneys' offices across the country and is the liaison between the U.S. attorneys and other federal agencies and Department of Justice components.

It is a position with enormous importance and a broad range of areas of responsibility. Battle deals with issues of policy development, helps to communicate those developments to field offices, comments on provisions such as sentencing guidelines and the USA Patriot Act, and worries about "budgets, personnel and a whole lot in between."

In Buffalo, where his office's high-profile cases included the Lackawanna Six terrorism prosecution, he had administrative responsibilities, too, Battle said. The difference: "I get about 15 times more e-mail now."

"I am not practicing law in the traditional sense," he said. "The last time I was in the courtroom was when I was a Family Court judge. But I still have to do legal research, and I still think like a practitioner."

It is a position with a very public component as well. Just a few days after he reported for work, Battle hosted an "Ask the White House" Web chat about the Patriot Act. He also wrote a piece for USA Today articulating the reasons for the administration's support of the Patriot Act.

Battle was appointed to the position by Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales, who said in making the announcement: "Throughout his career as a prosecutor, civil attorney, judge, and public defender, Michael has served with distinction. As director of the Executive Office for U.S. Attorneys, he will bring with him a high degree of legal expertise and practical experience. Michael is an outstanding lawyer and a dedicated public servant, and I thank him for his



continued service with the Department of Justice."

Battle draws on experience that has included, besides his work with the U.S. attorney's office in Buffalo, service as a Legal Aid attorney, a Family Court judge and a stint with the New York State attorney general's office. He also helped to establish the Rochester and Buffalo Federal Public Defender's Offices.

He has been president of the Minority Bar Association of Western New York and a member of numerous boards and organizations, including the UB Law School Dean's Advisory Council. He was serving as president-elect of the UB Law Alumni Association when he had to step down because of his appointment as US Attorney for the Western District of N.Y.

Now he deals directly with the nation's attorney general and, even as he learns his way around the city, sometimes finds himself in high-profile situations.

"I started this job on a Monday," Battle says. "On Tuesday I was invited to

be with the president that Friday morning – at a location about which I could not even give anybody directions. I stood within five feet of him on stage to talk about the Patriot Act. Before that, five of us were in a holding room, and I chatted with the president, walked around with him, greeted staff with him. As I was getting on line to go out to the stage, Attorney General Gonzales welcomed me, (CIA Director) Porter Goss welcomed me, (Director of National Intelligence) John Negroponte welcomed me.

"I said to my wife later, 'Never in a million years would I have expected this.'"

A sobering responsibility came with the establishment of a Katrina Fraud Task Force, dedicated to investigating and prosecuting fraud related to the Gulf Coast hurricane. The task force is co-located in Washington and Baton Rouge, La., and Battle went there and to New Orleans to help establish the office.

"I was on the ground in a Ford F-150," he said. "I drove up to the 17th Street Levee, stood on top of it and got a bird's-eye view of what happened. For historical purposes, I put my hand on the barge that broke through the levee. The devastation was incredible. It was a frightening scene."

Battle and his wife, Sheila, have three children; only their son, Michael II, is still at home. They have maintained a residence in Western New York so he can finish high school (he is in his junior year), and Battle commutes home from Washington generally twice a month.

Not that his workdays would allow for much of a family life anyway. "I get here at 7:15 in the morning, and I generally work until 7 at night. My day goes very fast, and a lot of things happen over the course of the day," he said.

"I have been real lucky. The staff is wonderful. We talk about all kinds of policy issues. We talk about government, politics. I get up every day and I love coming to work."