The Wesleyan Lawyers Association (WLA) was delighted to sponsor this timely WESeminar at 2011 Reunion/Commencement Weekend. We welcomed two of our members who practice law in Connecticut, Thomas M. Brockett, Esq. ’87, Joseph B. Summa, Esq. ’71, as well as Ronald W. Schatz, Professor of History at Wesleyan, to present a panel discussion on the state of unions in America, in particular public sector unions, titled: “The Great Recession and the Receding Rights and Powers of the Guaranteed American Middle Class.”

A crowd of over eighty Wes students, parents, friends, and WLA members engaged in a lively discussion with the panel about the struggle many states are facing with budget crises and public sector union contracts.

Ronald Schatz, a scholar on the history of unions in America, provided a historical overview of the union movement, setting the context for present day struggles. Thomas Brockett, an attorney with experience representing unions and serving as a former officer of the once dismantled air traffic controllers’ union, and Joseph Summa, a labor law attorney who has represented the executive branch and management in negotiations with public employee and private unions, discussed their experiences working with unions and on collective bargaining. The panel engaged in an impassioned debate about the status and future of public sector unions and how the current economic downturn impacts unions and public sector employees.

The WLA is pleased that this captivating topic also provided a forum for our members to connect with each other and with the Wesleyan community.

We are grateful to our members who helped us put this event together, to our engaged attendees, to Thomas M. Brockett, Joseph B. Summa, and Ronald W. Schatz for a marvelous and engaging discussion, and to our alma mater - Wesleyan.