



WHEN THE WINDS OF CHANGES SHIFT: MOVING FORWARD AT THE STATE BAR

*May your hands always be busy
May your feet always be swift
May you have a strong foundation
When the winds of changes shift
May your heart always be joyful
And may your song always be sung
May you stay forever young*
—excerpt from *Forever Young*
by Bob Dylan

In my final article for the President's Page, I find myself gravitating to the words of the Bard of Hibbing, Minnesota, Mr. Robert Zimmerman, aka Bob Dylan.

The lyrics above are excerpted from the song *Forever Young*, a song which appears twice on Dylan's 1974 album *Planet Waves*. The first version, which closes side 1 of the vinyl version, is slow paced, almost a lullaby. That version is followed by the same song, same lyrics, only a lively roots rocker to begin side 2. Only Bob Dylan could pull that off.

The simple brilliance of this song came to me as the result of a chance discovery in a used record store bin years ago. I was a young father at the time. The words struck me as a sentimental but poignant reflection on our best wishes for our children.

Reflecting on this song 20 years later, I read these lyrics from a different perspective. I think of this song as a prayer for resiliency, strength and fortitude in the face of challenge.

2025 was a year of change for many, of loss and renewal, of challenges and opportunities. It is years like this that we find out if we have "a strong foundation when the winds of changes shift."

As West Virginia lawyers, we collectively mourned the loss of our beloved Supreme Court Justice Tim Armstead. His legacy of integrity, hard work and servant leadership will leave a lasting mark to which

we should all strive. We also experienced Justice Beth Walker's departure from the Court. As we celebrated her well-earned retirement, we also recognized her for being a champion of civility and well-being within our profession.

We congratulated State Bar Executive Director Mary Jane Pickens upon her retirement and recognized her long legacy of service to the legal profession which concluded with her serving as our Director. I was fortunate to have worked along her side on many projects and witnessed firsthand how deeply she cares about her work. She will be missed.

Closer to home, I too found myself taking a new direction in 2025. With the retirement of Cabell County Circuit Court Judge Paul Farrell, I was most honored to be selected by Governor Morrissey from a pool of quality candidates

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to fill Judge Farrell’s vacated seat. This incredible opportunity fulfilled a career-long aspiration of mine to return to public service by serving on the bench in Cabell County. The one catch, and it’s a big one, is that upon assuming the position as a Circuit Court Judge, I was no longer eligible to serve on the Board of Governors, hence my resignation.

Now, as a former president, I have the unique opportunity to look back on the past year from a perspective that is not typical for the President’s Page. From my vantage point, what grabs my attention is not the disruption of change and other trials along the way, but instead the remarkable efforts of those among us who stepped up and worked hard to adapt, to grow and to meet the challenges of 2025. Among these individuals are our incredible State Bar staff; our members of the Board of Governors and Young Lawyer Board; and our partners at the West Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals, WVJLAP and the Office of Disciplinary Counsel. These folks are, in short, our foundation.

During my term as President, we hit the ground running. We set in motion plans to address difficult challenges, not the least of which were our budgetary issues previously discussed in these pages. We pursued initiatives to enhance attorney engagement in areas where we can do better, like lawyer mentoring (See: mentorshiprocket.com) and civics education in schools (See: wvbar.org/

national-constitution-center-scholar-exchange). We also worked on building better relationships with those we sometimes take for granted: our partners.

In 2026, I see a foundation only getting stronger. Our recently hired Executive Director, Kevin Baker, is a dynamic and capable leader with tremendous vision. He has taken up the torch from Director Pickens and seamlessly carried our mission forward. He will serve the Bar well.

President-Elect Robby Aliff and Vice President Kim Crockett graciously and enthusiastically took over leadership of the Board of Governors upon my departure. These two are no strangers to leadership or rolling up their sleeves to get the job done. I am not certain we could ask for a stronger succession of quality individuals to lead the State Bar into the future as these two.

That said, a strong foundation is not built in a year, nor is it typically built by one person. The strength of any organization takes the collective efforts and focus of many, over a sustained period of time. Whatever measure of success we experienced in 2025 was built upon the efforts of those who came before us and I am quite confident our work will be sustained by those to come after, even “when the winds of changes shift.”

It was an honor to serve this organization. I wish you all the very best, and I pray that “your heart always be joyful, and may your song always be sung — may you stay forever young.” **WVL**