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PRESIDENT'S PAGE

BY JUDGE NICHOLE C. PATTON

A Year of Purpose: Leading with Vision in the Age of AI

When I accepted the honor of serving as the CBA's 2025–2026 President, I did so with a clear conviction: that the legal profession was standing at a crossroads, and that this bar association had both the platform and the responsibility to help chart the path forward. The theme I chose, *AI 2035: The Legal Profession and the Judiciary in the Age of Artificial Intelligence*, was not merely a topic. It was a calling. A year later, as I prepare to pass the gavel, I can say without hesitation that this has been one of the most profound and purposeful seasons of my professional life.

From the outset, I wanted this bar year to be defined not by incremental progress, but by a genuine leap in how lawyers and judges think about artificial intelligence. We launched 10 specialized AI working committees, each chaired by a sitting judge and supported by an attorney vice chair, spanning everything from litigation and transactional practice to ethics, access to justice, and the future of legal education. The American Bar Association recognized our initiative as the first comprehensive bar association AI program of its kind in the country.

We initiated conversations that mattered. I had the privilege of joining the ISBA's panel on Trials and Tribulations: Judicial Visions for Artificial Intelligence, bringing the CBA's voice into a statewide dialogue about how our courts are preparing for an AI-driven future. Closer to home, we produced two CLEs that I am especially proud of. In February, we marked Black History Month with a powerful program examining the 14th Amendment's legacy through the lens of landmark housing discrimination cases, *Shelley v. Kraemer and Jones v. Alfred H. Mayer*, connecting the constitutional promises of the past to the justice challenges of the present. And our Pageants, Professionalism, and Power CLE, co-led by Erika Harold, Miss America 2003 and Executive Director of the Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Professionalism, explored the intersection of public presence, professional identity, and leadership in ways that resonated deeply with attorneys across career stages.

We drafted statements on the institutional integrity of our legal system. We honored giants of the profession at the Earl B. Dickerson Awards and recognized outstanding contributors to our legal community through the Vanguard Awards. We presented the Justice John Paul Stevens Award, celebrating the ideal of judicial excellence and public service

that Justice Stevens so nobly embodied. We honored former Chief Judge of the Circuit Court of Cook County Timothy C. Evans. We celebrated retired Justice Mary Jane Theis of the Illinois Supreme Court. And as Chair of the Coalition of Chicagoland Bar Associations, I was honored to help unify the voices of our region's legal community, advocating on matters of shared concern and strengthening bonds across our member organizations. Through it all, we kept our eyes fixed on the future.

That future arrived in full force at Venue Six10 on Michigan Avenue during May 11-13, 2026. The AI 2035 Symposium, the capstone event of my presidential year, exceeded every expectation I had dared to hold. Over three extraordinary days, more than 30 of the nation's leading legal minds, technologists, ethicists, and jurists gathered to explore what artificial intelligence means for our courts, our clients, and our profession.

Day one of the symposium laid the foundation, grounding attendees in the essential knowledge every lawyer needs in this new era. Day two turned to applied ethics and innovation, including a remarkable feature presentation on AI and the Integrity of the Legal System: Competence, Accountability, and Leadership in the Era of Intelligent Tools. Day three looked boldly to the horizon, challenging us to redesign legal workflows for the next decade through human and machine collaboration. Attendees earned up to 18 Illinois MCLE credits across three breakout tracks—Litigation, Transactional, and Administrative/Operational—ensuring that the learning was not only transformative but practical.

I am deeply grateful to Illinois Appellate Court Justice Rena Van Tine and Judge Megan Goldish who served as Symposium Co-Chairs, and to Joel Bruckman, our tireless Vice Chair and Director of Sponsorships. To our generous sponsors whose support made this vision a reality, and to the more than 30 speakers, including Professor Eric Posner of the University of Chicago Law School; Professor Daniel Linna, Jr. and Professor Hari Osofsky of Northwestern Pritzker School of Law; Charles Elliott of Google, and so many others who generously contributed their expertise: thank you. You showed up for the profession, and the profession is better for it.

To my Executive Board, the Board of Managers, and the CBA professional staff, led with such grace and competence, I am forever grateful. You held the institution steady through every challenge and celebrated every milestone with genuine joy. To the Coalition of Chicagoland Bar Associations, thank you for your continued partnership.

To my students at UIC School of Law, you inspire me every time I walk into that classroom. It was a particular honor to serve as the keynote speaker at the UIC School of Law Commencement Ceremony, addressing the Class of 2026 on May 9, exactly 30 years to the day after I received my own JD from that same institution. I hope you heard what I most needed you to know: that the law is still a noble calling, that technology is a tool and not a replacement for justice, and that your generation will shape what comes next.

As I conclude this chapter, I am reminded of why I said yes to this role at the beginning of the bar year. Not for the title, but for the opportunity to serve and to use every platform available to me to make this profession more prepared, more equitable, and more human. I believe we did that this year. And I believe that AI 2035 planted seeds that will grow for decades.

To the attorneys who make up the CBA: It has been the honor of my life to lead you. Go forward with courage, with integrity, and with the unshakable conviction that the rule of law, guided by wise and compassionate people, is still the best hope we have.

Ad maiorem Dei gloriam. ■

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