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# When lawyers speak, America listens

By American Bar Association President William R. Bay

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Six months ago, the American Bar Association faced a choice.

Across the country, the rule of law was being tested — not just in courtrooms, but in classrooms, statehouses, and within the public discourse. Public servants were penalized for doing their jobs. There were calls to impeach judges for their decisions. There was a pattern of resistance to court orders. There was a government-wide attack on diversity. Civic norms were eroding. Threats, retribution and coarse language characterized how government officials treated those who disagreed with them. We witnessed the dehumanization of people and the violation of their civil and human rights.

These all continue today.

Throughout these last few months, many within the profession have asked: *Should we speak?*

But the more important question facing the ABA was: *What happens if we don't?*

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What happened next was powerful.

Our Feb.10 statement became one of the ABA's most-read and shared in years. Members and non-members alike called or wrote to express their pride in the Association speaking out.

Some even joined the ABA for the first time.

This isn't about scoring political points — the ABA is nonpartisan. Our mission isn't to be for or against any administration, but to defend constitutional principles when they're under threat. That defines our moment and our mandate.

But the moment demanded more than passive observation. We matched our words with action.

This year, the ABA filed suit to defend lawyers' rights to represent any client. We stood up for diversity in the profession even as efforts were being made to dismantle programs. We chose to continue to support the elimination of bias in our courts and the legal profession. We thought everyone supported this. And during ABA Day on Capitol Hill, we defended the Legal Services Corporation — ensuring that future public service lawyers can serve the most vulnerable.

In courthouses, conferences and community centers, people have told us: *"The ABA has found its voice. And so have we."*

As Chief Justice John Roberts reminded us in May: *"Judicial independence is crucial...to check the excesses of Congress or the executive."* He added that

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who need us most. That promise unites law students, solo practitioners, public defenders, prosecutors, law firms, attorneys and jurists alike.

And it is working.

We've seen a surge in meaningful engagement — not just online, but in real conversations. Law school deans are organizing dialogues on the issues we have highlighted. Bar associations are mobilizing. Young lawyers are stepping forward to be part of a new and better future.

The ABA is not leading alone. We're leading together with other organizations — and that's where the promise of justice lives.

We are not the same Association we were six months ago. We're stronger, clearer, and more grounded. We've rededicated ourselves to the work we exist to do.

The road ahead won't be easy — but when lawyers speak up, the country listens. When we act together, justice moves forward.

Because the rule of law does not defend itself. Lawyers do.

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