

FROM THE CHIEF

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SERVICE OVER SELF

Remembering Justice Tim Armstead's Example, One Year Later

This past August marked one year since we lost our friend and colleague, Justice Tim Armstead. In the months since, I have often thought about how to properly honor what Tim meant to this Court and to our profession. His legacy invites us to carry his greatest qualities forward into how we practice law every day.

When Tim passed, I noted that he lived a life marked by integrity, servant leadership, and unwavering faith, and that his service on the Court reflected those values. He never viewed his role as a justice as a position of power, but as a sacred responsibility to serve others. We should aspire to live up to this standard and to sustain it even now that the tributes have been written, his seat has been filled, and more than a year has passed. It is this standard that I endeavor to emphasize, refuse to forget, and will continue to carry for years to come.

Service Over Self

Zealous advocacy is, and should remain, a bedrock obligation owed to clients. But the concomitant duties of civility, doing justice, and upholding the Rule of Law itself sit alongside that obligation. Justice Armstead understood that these duties are not incompatible with one another so much as they are in balance; a lawyer or a judge who loses sight of civility, fairness, or the larger system we serve in pursuit of a desired result has abandoned something essential to the profession, no matter the outcome in any single case. Servant leadership, modeled by Justice Armstead, means putting the interests of the client, the Court, and the Constitution ahead of one's own ego or convenience, in ways large and small, case after case, year after year.

Stewards of the Rule of Law

The past year has been a period of significant change at the Supreme

Court as two of the Court's five seats were vacated: the first by Justice Beth Walker's retirement after nearly a decade of distinguished service followed by the second vacancy due to the unexpected loss of Justice Armstead. Those seats have been filled by two new justices each, first by gubernatorial appointments, then through elections this past May. Our retired colleague, Senior Status Justice John Hutchison, also answered the call and stepped in to ensure each seat was filled while appointments were pending, adding his trusted voice of experience during these transitions.

Even throughout this season of change and turnover, our Court continues to function. During our Fall 2025 and Spring 2026 terms, we considered cases, heard oral arguments, issued opinions and decisions, and continued to oversee the people and resources entrusted to us in the Court's role in administering the State's entire judicial

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branch. That continuity is by design. Our system of government, and an independent judiciary in particular, is built to withstand the changing of any individual who occupies a position within it. None of us — not the Chief Justice, not any single justice, not any practitioner standing before us — is the institution. We are each stewards of the positions we hold, for whatever season we hold them, and ultimately our collective stewardship upholds the Rule of Law itself.

This concept, exemplified by Justice Armstead, reframes the question every lawyer and judge should be asking ourselves. Rather than wondering, “What can I accomplish for myself in this role?”, we should be considering, “Am I conducting myself in a way that upholds the values that make the practice of law and an independent judiciary so sacred?” When each of us commits to being a good steward of the position, the power, and the influence we hold, however modest or significant, justice continues to be done, our system works, and the public’s trust in the judiciary, and in the practice of law itself, is preserved for the next lawyer, the next judge, and the next West Virginian who walks through a courthouse door.

Exercising good stewardship in the practice of law looks different depending on where you sit. It of course depends on what area of law you practice, and, more importantly, how you practice it and show up, day in and day out — how you speak to your clients; how you treat opposing counsel, support staff, and the judges

before whom you appear; whether you take the time to mentor a young lawyer or encourage a young citizen to consider serving in this profession. For many dedicated lawyers, good stewardship is demonstrated by willingly taking on a pro bono or appointed case for a person in one of our state’s legal deserts who might otherwise have no meaningful way to access our courts or receive the due process our Constitution promises them.

We all know that there are many aspects of practice that are not glamorous or even lucrative, but very little of servant leadership is. Throughout his career and particularly during his time on the bench, Tim Armstead never sought personal praise for his public service and commitment to the Rule of Law, and I suspect that is precisely why he was so good at it. It is also why we are still feeling the loss so keenly one year later.

An Invitation, Not Just a Remembrance

While taking a moment to remember our friend and colleague, I invite every member of the West Virginia State Bar to take stock of your stewardship of the values we are called to uphold. Are you championing those values in your interactions with clients, colleagues, courts, and the public we all serve? Remind yourself and those working alongside you of the bigger purpose behind the work we do. That is how we honor Justice Armstead’s example. And it is how we ensure that, whatever change comes to this Court or to this profession in the years ahead, the things that matter most about it will endure. **WV**