October 8, 2025 Federal Bar Council Remarks
Remarks by Hon. Victor A. Bolden

In recent public appearances, I have noted how these times seem like a period of existential, even apocalyptic, angst. But I also have noted that has been true of many times before, and have quoted William Butler Yeats's poem, the Second Coming[i], Jesmyn Ward's book, Salvage the Bones[ii], and the title of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s last book, —written in 1967 just a year before his assassination—*Where Do We Go from Here? Chaos or Community*.[iii] I have even used the language from the Declaration of Independence, and its concerns about the threat of seemingly autocratic rule then to illustrate that this nation has felt in turmoil from its outset[iv].

All of these allusions are intended to underscore that our ability to withstand any challenge today, just as it was the case yesterday, is contingent not on current events, but the depth of our belief in the sustainability of American democracy.

Tonight, in the midst of yet another government shutdown, and a seemingly unbridgeable political divide, I want to offer one more lesson from history: the Montgomery Bus Boycott. This event, which lasted 381 days – more than a year -- if you count the time from Rosa Parks' arrest for refusing to give up her seat on a racially segregated bus to the time the boycotters returned to the city's buses, is a lesson in resilience, perhaps unmatchable in today's time.

Because with the constant noise from social media, and our inability to focus on the bigger picture, you wonder whether the Montgomery Bus Boycott would have lasted even 10 days before someone said that this is not going to work, much less 100 days, or 200 days, or well beyond 300 days. To be sure, it was difficult and uncomfortable for them in Montgomery because during that lengthy period, there were legal, economic and even physical threats and actions taken to stop them. But they kept going.

Indeed, as Dr. King said in announcing the boycott's conclusion: "We have seen truth crucified and goodness buried, but we have kept going with the conviction that truth crushed to earth will rise again."[v] And, as we all know, their faith in American democracy was "vindicated."[vi]

Tonight's event, the Federal Bar Council's Connecticut Committee dinner is a time to celebrate our deep-seated belief in the sustainability of American democracy, and the work that each of you do every day to help maintain the rule of law in the District of Connecticut. And so let me end this portion of my remarks by saying thank you!

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[i] Victor A. Bolden, Proof: The Rule of Law's Most Essential Element, 56 Connecticut Law Review 3, 916 ("Turning and turning in the widening gyre The falcon cannot hear the falconer; Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world, the blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere The ceremony of innocence is drowned; The best lack all conviction, while the worst Are full of passionate intensity.")(quoting W.B. Yeats, The Second Coming, in Collected Poems 186 (1956)(footnote omitted).

[ii] Id. at 942 ("And then I get up because it is the only thing I can do. I step out of the ditch and brush the ants off because it is the only thing I can do. I follow Randall around the house because it is the only thing I can do; if this is strength; if this weakness, this is what I do. . . . I learned how to cry so that almost no tears leaked out of my eyes, so that I swallowed the hot salty water of the and felt them running down my throat. This was the only thing we could do. I swallow and squint through tears, and I run.")(quoting Jesmyn Ward, Salvage the Bones 206 (2011)(footnote omitted).

[iii] Id. at 916-17 (quoting Martin Luther King Jr., Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community? 12 (1967).

[iv] Id. at 931-935; see also id. at 934-35 ("This litany reinforces the notion that America in general, and the American legal systems in particular, is not intended simply to be an idea. But it is a place where these ideas, and the ideals underlying them, are put into practice.")
[v] Martin Luther King, Jr., Stride Toward Freedom (1958), reprinted in A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr., 460-61 (James M. Washington ed., 1986)(chronicling Martin Luther king, Jr's memoir of the Montgomery bus boycott).
[vi] Id. at 461.