Changing of the guard

“Didn’t we just do this?” said ABA’s chief, lowering his tall frame into a chair in his office in that familiar semi-slouched position. Yes, actually, we did just do this—“this” referring to an interview—but the subject of that earlier session, we reminded him, was about the Dodd-Frank Act. This one was for an article about him, now that he’s leaving ABA. “Oh, yes,” he recalled, with an air of resignation. It was the end of another busy week, and getting near the end of a five-year run leading the industry’s largest trade group. And “run” is the right word.

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More than that, though, Yingling was in the process of closing the books on 25 years of ABA service. There are other ABA staff members who have toiled away at 1120 Connecticut Ave. as long as Yingling—and a handful even longer—but because of his prominent role from day one, it is hard to imagine ABA without him.

Still, no one person defines the ABA, and even now, Yingling’s replacement is on board and will take over the reins on Jan. 1. Former Oklahoma Governor Frank Keating brings an impressive resume to the post (see page 13), and will soon begin to make his own mark as CEO. That story is yet to be told. The outgoing CEO’s story, however, is nearly complete, and it’s fitting that it be reviewed.

The feature beginning on page 38 tells some of it. You won’t find a detailed compilation of all the legislative, regulatory, and legal contests ABA engaged in on Yingling’s watch—first as head of Government Relations, then as ABA president. That would be more like an encyclopedia. The article here is intended more as a “departure portrait.”

Yingling has served the industry very ably. He would say, appropriately enough, that the association’s achievements during his time were not just about his efforts. The results reflect the work of the entire ABA team, the state associations, and not least many bankers.

Service is an admirable endeavor. Bankers know that. Many if not most of them are in the business at least partly because of the opportunities it provides to be of service to communities, businesses, individuals. So it’s fitting that their trade group should be likewise motivated. Some outsiders no doubt would scoff at that depiction of a trade group. Perhaps some organizations deserve that reaction. But in our experience the American Bankers Association operates not only with purpose and skill, but with integrity.

Good leadership makes that happen.

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