



BILL BARRETT

Legal Eagle

By Matt Ottinger

Bill Barrett is a man who wears many hats. A partner at the Williams Barrett & Wilkowski law firm in Greenwood, the upstate New York native didn't initially plan to become an attorney.

In fact, he was drawn to Indiana – his mother's native state with roots in Goshen and a family farm in Howard County – by his love of history.

"I thought I was going to teach Russian history and (Indiana University) is, and particularly during the Cold War, was a big center for the study of all things Russian and East European in those days," Barrett shares, noting he came to graduate school in Bloomington following an undergraduate education at Miami University (Ohio).

"But I came to realize that an academic career is sometimes hard to acquire," he reveals. "I mean, there are a lot of PhD historians who aren't teaching or in the field of Russian history, and there are a lot of them who would go to work for the (Central Intelligence Agency) or Department of Defense."

Turn to the law

Perhaps it was a practical move at first, but Barrett has found delight in helping clients navigate legal challenges, now practicing primarily in the areas of commercial and probate litigation, and local government law and civil rights litigation.

When asked about his favorite part of being an attorney, Barrett responds, "The variety of areas of law that I get to learn about and focus on, and the variety of people that I get to interact with. Clients from all different walks of life, different experiences, with different issues."

Barrett also was a clerk for both the Indiana Court of Appeals and the Indiana Tax Court. He followed that by becoming a prosecutor in Johnson County and then serving as magistrate for the Johnson circuit and superior courts.

As for his firm, he states, "We represent almost every government unit in (Johnson County), and as defense counsel, we represent police agencies and cities and towns and counties across the state."

His career shift toward the law and business is a move that has greatly benefited the Indiana Chamber of Commerce, as Barrett has been a respected contributor to the board of directors (and executive committee), as well as its political action committee, Indiana Business for Responsive Government (IBRG).



Barrett enjoys lending his years of expertise to clients and colleagues in a variety of areas, and his background in history helps give him a broad perspective of the world.



Political leaning

Barrett has served as the IBRG co-chair since 2021, and he helps lead the volunteer group that sets strategy, political endorsements and other oversight. He’s a top level investor in the program as well.

“Bill provides not only engaged leadership to our IBRG PAC, but a really thoughtful and consensus-building approach working with other volunteers,” praises Jeff Brantley, the Indiana Chamber’s senior vice president of political affairs. “His insights and strategic approach really make a difference, bringing real credibility and solid decision-making processes to our political action program.”

When asked about being drawn to politics, Barrett offers he’s been “in and around it my whole life” because of his mother.

“(She) was a forensic pathologist – rare for someone her age. She was born in the early 1920s and was elected coroner in the county where I grew up for over 20 years. It’s very rare anywhere for the elected official in that role to actually be the medical examiner. But she was,” Barrett explains. “So, I would go on calls with her from time to time when I got older, late night calls when she would have to go out. And I saw the political side of her keeping that position for four and a half terms.”

Giving back

Barrett also remains engaged civically, serving as the board chair of the Indiana Historical Society, immediate past president of the Columbia Club and as a member of the National Conference of Commissioners on

Uniform State Laws, to name a few endeavors.

As a leader, he’s happy to impart wisdom on younger colleagues and mentees – especially in the field of law. He believes that evolutions in technology have changed how some practice, but that can be to their detriment.

“The first thing I say to young lawyers is, ‘Pick up the phone and use it as a phone and call the lawyer on the other side,’” Barrett asserts. “The job is about resolving people’s differences or getting to the point where a transaction can be closed, or a contract can be entered.

“Of course, you have to write, but if you don’t have the personal touch, if you immediately go to a text or an email without ever having any contact with the other person, it’s a lot harder to get things done,” he clarifies.

Fostering freedom

As far as his enthusiasm for the Indiana Chamber, it harkens back to his robust knowledge of the communist bloc. That rendered Barrett passionate about the power and importance of freedom – ergo why serving the Chamber is so crucial.

“The Chamber is the embodiment of free market democratic capitalism, which has done more to ameliorate human misery and advance humanity than anything else devised by man,” Barrett declares. “And the Chamber helps support that system on both sides, meaning the free market capitalism side and the democratic side – small ‘d’ – and democratic popular elections.

“I’m very committed to work that will help maintain that system and IBRG – by focusing on the election of candidates who share the Chamber’s pro-business vision – is a perfect way to tie those things.”

Barrett relishes the opportunity to help, revealing the Chamber has benefited him as well.

“Being part of the Chamber has given me the opportunity to meet employers and businesspeople from all different industries, all different walks of life – large employers and small employers from across the state,” he concludes. “And it’s really given me perspective that is helpful in everything I do.” ■

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