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New DC Bar Leader On Guiding Group Amid Political Tumult

By **Alison Knezevich**


Sadina Montani

Law360 (July 7, 2025, 4:42 PM EDT) -- New D.C. Bar President Sadina Montani wasn't on the ballot this year, but she is taking the reins of the nation's largest mandatory bar after a contentious election in which national politics took center stage.

Bar members chose Montani as president-elect in 2024, and she spent the past year in that role. Her term as president began on July 1 and comes after this year's heated race between Paul Hastings LLP's Brad Bondi, the brother of U.S. Attorney General Pam Bondi, and solo employment attorney Diane Seltzer, who overwhelmingly won and will take over next year.

As she begins her yearlong term this month, Montani told Law360 Pulse she's mindful of the challenges of leading an organization that represents members across the political spectrum.

The Crowell & Moring LLP employment law partner succeeds Shaun Snyder, the CEO of the National Association of State Treasurers, who served as bar president for the past year. Montani was previously president of the Women's Bar Association of the District of Columbia from 2020 to 2021, leading the organization during the pandemic.

She joined Crowell in 2020 from Vedder Price PC. As an employment lawyer, Montani often thinks of the human side of the law, she said, whether it's how attorneys work post-pandemic or the impact of artificial intelligence.

While she has been deeply involved in the Washington, D.C., legal community for some time, Montani almost took a different career path. Growing up in the western Michigan city of Holland, she was a talented violist. She earned a bachelor's degree in music performance from Western Michigan University and started graduate school at Michigan State University to continue her studies. She has also worked as a freelance musician, performing in symphonies.

But Montani had always been drawn to the law and ended up leaving her home state for the nation's capital, where she earned a master's degree in history and worked as a paralegal before graduating from the George Washington University Law School.

Law360 Pulse recently spoke to Montani about her priorities as D.C. Bar president, her path to a legal career and more. Questions and answers have been edited for length and clarity.

What will be your focus this year as president?

As an employment lawyer, I'm always drawn to the people aspect of problems. As I'm thinking about the future of the practice, I have been thinking a lot about the idea of the practice of law as being based on an apprenticeship model.

Five years from the onset of the pandemic and all of the incredibly fast changes that came from how we work and how we train more junior lawyers, and with the incredible advancement of AI technology in the past year or two — what does it mean to be a lawyer and to teach the next generation of lawyers as we're working very differently from how we were working even five years ago?

The D.C. Bar is the largest unified bar in the country, and we have such a diversity of practice types, practice areas and practitioners. How do we leverage that breadth of perspectives to bring together stakeholders for conversations that are practical and honest about how we're practicing law now?

We need to be thinking carefully about training up new lawyers and making sure that they get the experiences that they need to, and also not put our heads in the sand around technology, both in terms of the way we interact with one another and with clients, and the impact that AI will continue to have on the practice.

During the D.C. Bar election this year, there was a lot of debate about how the organization should respond to attacks on the rule of law. What will be your approach to supporting the rule of law and responding to threats to it?

The D.C. Bar is a mandatory bar that's in a very unique position in the country. We're both at the epicenter of this, and we're the largest. I'm continuing to appreciate more and more, as I have been serving as president-elect, the differences between leading a voluntary bar — which I did with the Women's Bar Association — and a mandatory bar. We're very different organizations, and we operate with different parameters.

I spoke at my swearing-in about how important the oath of office that Chief Judge [Anna] Blackburne-Rigsby administered to me was. The oaths of office that we all take as lawyers are really fundamental to our profession, and are not optional. We're all officers of the court.

At the same time, a mandatory bar is there to serve very specific purposes, and how we navigate through hyper-politicized waters is going to be a challenge for our organization and for lots of different organizations. We have an incredibly impressive executive team and legal counsel, and I intend to rely on them and their expertise as we're thinking about what we as an organization should be doing to support our members, particularly those who are, in this moment, in career transitions.

But also, the bar can't be all things to all people. We as individuals can have our own perspectives, but that's different from the roles that we play as fiduciaries to an organization that has a lot of members across the whole political spectrum that we have to support in their practice of law.

You've taken part in discussions about the implications of artificial intelligence as a member of your firm's technology innovation committee. How do you use AI in your own work?

Primarily, I am using AI for my non-legal work product, and I'm finding it to be incredibly helpful in terms

of those efficiencies — whether it is preparing remarks for an event, pulling together information about potential clients, thinking about presenting on a specific topic or [continuing legal education], and using that as a resource to do the non-billable work that would have otherwise taken a poor associate a lot of time to pull together for me. I'm finding a lot of efficiencies there. We're also using it in time entry.

How did you go from professional musician to lawyer?

I wanted to be a lawyer when I was a little kid. I was really drawn to the lawyers that I saw on TV and was also interested in history and in government. I also was a pretty talented musician. I, a few generations back, have a lot of musicians in my family. I was encouraged to pursue my career as a musician. Being a musician is incredibly fun, and it's also a lot of hard work.

I was a first-generation college student. Then I started graduate school for music performance after getting a full-ride scholarship. I very quickly realized that doing only music was just not for me. I came back to this idea of potentially going to law school. I did not think that I could get into law school with just a music degree as my undergraduate degree.

And so I came out to D.C.

I started grad school part-time at George Washington in a master's in history program. As luck would have it, the first job that I got through a temp placement agency when I came to D.C. was working as a junior paralegal at a law firm. It really demystified the practice of law. I was doing franchise registration work. Even in that sometimes rather dry area, I saw how interesting the practice of law was and how much I felt drawn to it.

And so as I was working through a master's degree, I thought, well, I'm either going to continue and get a Ph.D. and be a history professor, or I should just give it a try and see how I do on the LSAT. I finally got up the nerve to take the LSAT, and I guess the rest is history.

What role does music have in your life now?

I love music. I no longer even have an instrument. I kept mine for a while, and I would pick it up every once in a while, but my expectation every time would be that I could play it like I did when I was practicing six hours a day.

The muscles don't remember in the way that the brain thinks the muscles should remember. I think that at some point when my legal career is less hectic, I'll probably take cello lessons. It's a string instrument, but it's a very different set of muscle movements. But I don't play anymore. It's just something that, once you've been doing it kind of as your full-time job, doing it as a hobby, for me, was not something that I was able to pull off.

Is there anything you would like to add?

We've been having conversations in the legal community about how we leverage the opportunities of AI to increase access to justice and to make pro bono work more efficient — and to make sure that volunteer lawyers have as many resources as they need.

Here in the District, specifically, we're facing significant cuts to the Access to Justice Initiative with the current proposed budget that could really impact the ways in which we're able to provide pro bono

support to communities. There is far more need for pro bono and low bono legal support than even this community can provide now, and cutting that funding is really placing the community in a challenging situation.

Our pro bono lawyers need to have the infrastructure of all the organizations that are set up to leverage the generosity of lawyers who are volunteering — whether it's for clinics, whether it's for medium-term engagements, whether it's for full-blown litigation cases — they need to have the support structure around them to be able to make sure that pro bono support is provided and it's provided well and ethically.

And so thinking about how we leverage AI is going to be really important to make sure that we're seeing those benefits across the socioeconomic spectrum, and that we're using that as necessary to help fill gaps as funding issues are impacting the ways in which legal services providers are going to be able to do their important work.

--Editing by Philip Shea.
