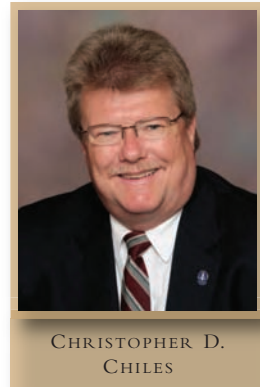


In Profile

Christopher D. Chiles



CHRISTOPHER D. (CHRIS) CHILES KNEW from the time he was five years old that he wanted to be an attorney when he grew up. In 1980, some 20 years later, his dream came true when he graduated from the West Virginia University College of Law and began practicing law in Huntington, West Virginia. He joined the Cabell County Prosecuting Attorney's Office as an assistant prosecutor in 1982 and became the elected prosecutor in 1990. Chris has had that job ever since and is presently serving his sixth term.

Chris became West Virginia's state director on the NDAA Board of Directors over 12 years ago. He eventually became a vice-president and over the years has co-chaired three different committees for NDAA: the National Committee, the Juvenile Justice and Family Law Committee and, most recently, the Ethics and Services Committee. In July 2008, Chris became the president-elect at the summer conference in Tucson, Arizona, and took office as president of NDAA two months ago at the summer conference in Orlando.

"It is one of the highest honors of my life to serve America's prosecutors as president of NDAA," Chris Chiles said. "This is a great organization made up of truly amazing individuals whose only goal each day is to do justice and protect society from criminals and the violent acts they often commit. Prosecutors are the real public defenders and to have the opportunity to represent them and speak on their behalf is both an honor and a very humbling experience."

Cabell County is the second largest county in West Virginia, with a population of 90,000 to 100,000 people. Chris supervises a staff of 20, which includes nine full-time assistant prosecutors, four part-time assistants, one investigator, three victim advocates, and three secretaries. His office handles approximately 350 felony indictments, over 7,500 misdemeanor cases, 500 juvenile cases, and over 100 child abuse and neglect cases each year. Although being the elected prosecutor requires that he perform many administrative duties to oversee the day-to-day operation of his office, he is still a trial lawyer at heart and carries a full caseload. Chris has lost count of the number of jury trials he has had, but guesses it is over 150. He still handles most of the murder

trials in his county, all the arson cases, and many of the drug and violent crime cases.

Huntington is located in the southwest part of West Virginia on the Ohio River, with both Ohio and Kentucky being just minutes away. It is the home of Marshall University, which many are aware of due to the recent movie *We Are Marshall*. That movie chronicles the story of the November 14, 1970, plane crash that killed all on board, including almost the entire football team and many city residents who had flown with the team to an away game and depicts how the school and community dealt with the aftermath of that tragedy. Once a thriving industrial and railroad hub, Huntington is now more of a business, academic and health center, with Marshall University, its medical school, and two major hospitals being its largest employers.

While West Virginia routinely has the lowest crime rate in the nation, Cabell County often has the highest crime rate per capita in the state.

"A number of years ago, our city police department suffered some very significant layoffs due to budget problems," Chris said. "Unfortunately, this was at the same time that 'crack' cocaine was really getting big in our area. Out of town drug dealers, mainly from Detroit, came in and really established a foothold here that our police did not have the personnel to adequately deal with due to the cutbacks. Naturally, that led to some significant increases in other criminal activity, especially violent crimes such as robberies and shootings," he added. "Thankfully, in the last two years we have hired a new police chief who is doing a wonderful job and has really turned the department around. Staffing levels are finally up to where they were before the layoffs. As a result, our crime rate, including our violent crimes, is decreasing for the first time in years."

Chris has seen a lot of changes in the 25 plus years he has been a prosecutor. "Back in the 1980s, our problems were commonly crimes like domestic-related murders, felonious assault, armed robbery and some sexual assault," he said. "And these crimes were committed by local defendants. Defendants from out of town, gang crimes, and drug related shootings and murders were pretty much unheard

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Brian Pepler, prosecuting attorney of Chippewa County and president of the Prosecuting Attorneys Association of Michigan, recently received a Crime Fighter award from the Fight Crime, Invest in Kids organization.

Michigan's Macomb County prosecuting attorney, **Eric Smith**, and Charlevoix County prosecuting attorney, **John Jarema**, were presented with Lifesaver Awards by the Michigan chapter of MADD for their leadership in improving traffic safety in their jurisdictions.

David Barber, retired district attorney from Birmingham, Alabama, was presented with a special President's Award for his exceptional years of service to NDAA.



Message from the President

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of, at least in my jurisdiction. For us, the advent of 'crack' cocaine changed all that. A large percentage of our criminal defendants, both for drug offenses and violent crimes, now are from out of state, mainly from around Detroit, Michigan, and Columbus, Ohio," said Chris. "If we could close our borders to the out of state drug dealers, we would have our criminal activity under control in a very short period of time."

There have also been significant changes in both the role of victims and how criminal offenders are dealt with. "When I started as an assistant prosecutor, victims were rarely contacted to get their input prior to a plea offer being made or the case being resolved," he noted. "When I became the elected prosecutor in 1990, I received a grant and started the first victims' advocate division in any prosecutors' office in West Virginia. I now have three full-time victims' advocates."

The philosophy of how to punish offenders has also changed dramatically over the years. "We used to basically lock almost everyone up with just a relative few being placed on probation. There was no such thing as community corrections, home confinement, or pre-trial diversion. Drug Courts, Day Report Centers, Batterers Intervention Programs and the like were simply unheard of," Chris noted. "We don't often get the credit for it, but the fact is it was prosecutors who took the lead years ago in realizing that these various alternatives to incarceration were necessary and in many cases much more appropriate to simply locking people up. We all know there are many violent, dangerous and repeat offenders who should be locked up for a very long time. Recognizing that this does not apply to everyone and that there are those for whom alternatives to incarceration are indeed appropriate helps to free up the limited prison beds for those who deserve them," he added.

In addition to his involvement with NDAA, Chris has been very active for many years at the local, state and national level. He is a past president of the West Virginia Prosecuting Attorneys Association, past chairman and present board member of the West Virginia Prosecuting Attorneys Institute, and a past president of the West Virginia Association of Counties. He presently serves as a member of the Governors Commission on Drunk Driving Prevention, the Governors Commission on Crime, Delinquency and Corrections and has been appointed by the Governor of West Virginia to serve on two task forces studying domestic violence homicides and child fatalities. Chris has also been an adjunct professor at Marshall University in the Criminal Justice Department and currently teaches a course in the Forensic Science Master's Degree program at Marshall. He also regularly teaches classes at the West Virginia State Police Academy and is a frequent lecturer for other law enforcement agencies around the state. Nationally, Chris is a frequent faculty member at the NAC and has also taught numerous courses for NHTSA and the National Traffic Law Center. He was NDAA's representative to the ABA Commission on Effective Criminal Sanctions, a follow-up to the Kennedy Commission, and presently serves on the ABA's Criminal Justice Section Council. He is also a member of the National DWI Court Task Force of the National Association of Drug Court Professionals.

In his spare time, Chris is active in his church and gets his stress relief by refereeing high school and college soccer. When his sons, now 26, 24 and 19 were younger, he also enjoyed coaching soccer, coaching and umpiring baseball and participating in scouting with his sons. He has been married for nearly 29 years and is thankful to have such an understanding wife. "I am obviously going to be gone quite a bit this year and very busy when I am in town," Chris says. "My wife keeps telling me not to worry about it. She says she is used to being a single married person and insists things are much easier when I am gone anyway. I think she is mostly joking, but..."