The Challenges are Profound

ALTA President Mark Winter Poised to Tackle Threats

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ALTA President Mark Winter poised to tackle threats

Once Mark Winter arrived in Washington, D.C., as a freshman attending Georgetown University in 1962, it didn’t take long for him to fall in love with the nation’s capital. He quickly gained experience and used his knowledge to become a successful lobbyist. For more than 30 years, Winter has been an advocate for the title insurance industry on Capitol Hill. Now, he is prepared to lead ALTA in 2010 and propel it to future success.
A quiet and assertive Mark Winter arrived in Washington, D.C., in September 1962, when the Cleveland, Ohio, native was assigned a fourth-floor garret in Old North on the Georgetown University campus. While Winter expressed a calm demeanor, he could “destroy you with a couple of words if he had to,” according to his Georgetown roommate.

Armed with a personality trait needed to succeed in D.C., it didn’t take Winter long to develop a love affair with the nation’s capital. During his freshman year, he would wander about after his classes, relishing the grandeur of the capital. He looked with wonder at the vast Greco-Roman temples of government that lined the broad avenue. He would stand in the Capitol where Daniel Webster and John Calhoun debated and read with awe the frieze above the marble columns of the Supreme Court promising “Equal Justice Under Law.”

“Washington had advantages that no other city could offer,” Winter said. “To me, it was the center of the world.”

Potomac Fever Strikes
Winter volunteered for the President Nixon Election Campaign, and was named a director of Nixon’s Transition Office reporting to former Virginia Senator John Warner. His responsibilities included vetting cabinet candidates for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Department of Energy, the Council of Economic Advisors and a host of Ambassadorial candidates. When the dust settled, Winter was named special assistant to the U.S. Ambassador to Jamaica, the Honorable Vincent de Roulet.

Following his international duty, Winter joined the professional staffs of Reps. Bill Bray (R-Indiana) and Frances Bolton (R-Ohio).

The Stewart and ALTA Years
Since 1985, Winter has managed Stewart’s Washington, D.C., office and is responsible for the development and coordination of commercial and residential business and procurement of international land titling projects funded by various donor groups including USAID, the World Bank, IMF and the Millennium Challenge Corporation.

Winter, who is an executive vice president at Stewart, represents the company before Congress, HUD, various regulatory agencies and government sponsored enterprises such as Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac.

Prior to his time with Stewart, Winter served as the Director of Government Affairs for ALTA. Beyond serving as the association’s next president and succeeding Mike Pryor, Winter will continue to serve ALTA in many other ways. Winter continues to serve on the Board of Governors, Chairs the International Development Committee, and is a member of the TIPAC Board of Trustees, the Government Affairs Committee and the State Legislative and Regulatory Action Committee.

“Mark has been a great representative for our company and the industry on Capitol Hill,” said Stewart Morris Jr., president of Stewart Title Co. “Mark has made it his focus to keep a vigilant watch on the legislative and departmental activity in...”

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Winter is a “water bug.” He was baptized into the NGO water community through encouragement and leadership of his friend and business colleague Malcolm Morris, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Stewart Title Guaranty Company. Morris, an ALTA past president, urged Winter to join him on a mission trip to Kenya some 12 years ago. At that time Morris was chairman of Living Water International (LWI), a nonprofit, interdenominational Christian ministry whose mission is to provide clean drinking water to people in developing countries. Morris and Winter have visited east Africa countries, and through the leadership of Kenya President Mwai Kibaki, LWI has sponsored numerous water wells in the Masai and Kikuyu tribal regions. The wells have brought peace to conflicted areas. To date, LWI has drilled more than 500 wells and brought clean, safe water to an estimated 1.6 million Kenyans.

“Water is a strategic resource that has economic, humanitarian and security dimensions and has the potential for helping millions of people around the world,” Winter said.

He has recently addressed the Brookings Institute, the Center for Strategic and International Understanding, and the Congressional Water Caucus.

Winter’s favorite sport was baseball. He pitched for his prep school team and at Georgetown. However, his most memorable baseball moment was being selected the bat-boy for the 1961 Cleveland Indians. Sometime ask Winter to share with you the infamous “bat stretching story.” Another baseball memory – Mark played Class A ball for a team coached by Cleveland Indians Hall of Fame pitcher Bob Feller.

Winter played semi-pro football for the Hartford Charter Oaks of the Continental Football League. Winter said he was slow (still is), average height and weight and a bit eccentric (still is).

“As you can imagine, it just took a couple of weeks for reality to set in,” he said.

Although Winter survived the first cut, more and more “big boys” arrived at the Simsbury, Conn., training site – rejects from the New York Giants and Jets.

“The writing was on the wall,” Winter joked. “Anyway, my memories included many bruises, a noticeable limp and a realization that being small and slow is not conducive for a successful football career.”

Winter has been involved in a number of civic and social activities. He was chairman of the Mater Dei School Board of Trustees, member of the Georgetown Prep Board of Trustees, member of the Little Flower Parish Council; President of the 22,000 member Washington DC Metropolitan Area Catholic Youth Organization; Co-Founder and President of the Capital Group and a member of the Chevy Chase Club Board of Governors.

Mark and his wife, Carol Lynn, live in Chevy Chase, Md. The Winters have four sons and seven grandchildren.
order to be a voice of reason for the title and real estate industry. Now, as the incoming president of ALTA, Mark will draw on that experience in the industry and the nation’s capital to lead in the recovery of the real estate market and protection of the title industry in an environment of changing regulation and challenging economy.”

Also, Winter has served on the Advisory Board of World Mae, an organization to facilitate the development of a secondary market for home mortgage loans originated in countries throughout the world and is a charter member of the International Land Registration Association.

“Mark is a gentleman and a skilled and respected lobbyist,” added Mike Nichols, president of The Jones Abstract and Title Co. in Indiana. “His ability to bring opposite sides together will be extremely beneficial to ALTA.”

**ALTA Mission: 2010**

President Winter views the upcoming year as a most critical time—“challenges facing the land titling industry are profound.” On a philosophical note, Winter stated that the industry must “always respect reality, effectively assess the times and become relevant to them. This is our charge.”

A key component of Winter’s mission is the need to examine and respond to the many proposals addressing financial services reform and mortgage reform.

“In response to the evolving world of change, I recommend a program that will enhance the prospects for state and federal policymakers to truly understand the important and vital role of the land title industry,” he said.

**Winter’s proposals include:**

- The development of an “Education with a Face … Your Face” initiative. Encourage policymakers and regulators – members of Congress, State Insurance Commissioners, regulatory officials and professional staffers – to attend and participate in the closing process.
- To engage those responsible for our future role in the mortgage reform (CHANGE) process.
- To schedule appointments with members of Congress and State regulators to see “first hand” the leadership the closing officer provides – for buyer and seller alike – the documentation explanation, the reduction of consumer fears and stress, the understanding of the numerous facets involved in an efficient, safe, transparent closing – including the timely filing of documents and the professional handling of funds disbursement.
- 2010 is an election year and members of Congress WILL make themselves available to attend a closing. Constituent “care and feeding” is a key reelection component.
- Expand Anne Anastasi’s celebrated Title 101 education program. Winter said he plans to name additional educational “SWAT” teams that have the capability to “parachute” into areas of need on a moment’s notice.

Also, Winter remains concerned with the proposed creation of a Consumer Financial Protection Agency (CFPA), a subset of a major financial services reform blueprint. Although some modifications are under active consideration by Congress, Winter emphasized that the CFPA proposal is “more like fresh caught fish than fine wine. The proposal does not get better with age.”

“The CFPA generates several industry concerns including jurisdiction over credit-related insurance...
products including title,” he said. “CFPA is crafted in a manner that may extend the reach of federal government beyond RESPA implementation and enforcement to include a form of federal regulation of the land title industry. This would create a regulator fiat that places federal regulation as the dominant industry regulatory.”

Winter concluded his CFPA discussion with a President Reagan quote worth requoting – “The most terrifying words in the English language are: I’m from the government and I’m here to help.”

The unclear destiny of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac also poses concern for the industry. Presently the GSEs are bankrupt and, therefore, wards of the federal government. A variety of restructuring proposals have been discussed to ultimately reinvigorate the secondary mortgage market system.

“One, of course the product of choice in providing the securitization venue for banks to create larger pools of monies available for mortgage lending,” Winter said. “With changes in the wind, it is incumbent on the new breed GSEs to securitize their mortgage packages through the use of a title insurance wrapper. Although GSEs may come in different flavors, a nationalized model, a public utility model or a small private company model – all must have one common feature – title insurance protection.”

Successful ALTA Advocacy

History has brought us to a point where change is essential. Winter stated that the land title industry has been summoned not just to manage our companies but to transform them. Our task is to provide content to a wholly different and evolving real estate market.

“In the year ahead, ALTA must prove adaptable in areas that will affect the business and practice of reliable, safe and secure title insurance practices,” he said. “We must provide opportunities for future title professionals, help others in times of economic crisis, respond to consumer client needs in a global economy and advocate for values that strengthen the mortgage and real estate industry.”

Winter stresses the need to reach for a larger, broader and more active membership. The recently announced forms licensing initiative is a means to “unlock potential title professionals who are not active.” He said a successful advocacy program is based largely on the number of foot soldiers ALTA can attract.

“If the industry hopes to guide the changes coming down the pike in this Congress, it needs a new face and it needs to be the face of the constituent,” he said. “Nothing speaks more powerfully to a congressman or senator than someone running a business in their home district or state.”

“Our future is being decided now. Our credibility is at stake as an industry,” Winter concluded. “As I take over the presidency of ALTA, I want to extend my gratitude to past ALTA presidents for sharing their moral compass, to the board colleagues for sharing their wisdom and to the members of ALTA for sharing their confidence.”