**Independent Banker**

**From the Top**

**March 2022**

**Robert M. Fisher**

Chairman, ICBA

*Robert Fisher is president, CEO and chairman of Tioga State Bank in Spencer, N.Y.*

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Our financial system is unique in the world. No other country has such a diversified financial services network. And the role we play as community banks is not only important to our local communities but also vital to the economy of this country. We represent a critical part of the nation’s infrastructure for four key reasons:

1. **We are here for customers in good times and bad.** For example, my bank had a business customer who left for the (allegedly) greener pastures of a larger, multinational bank. During their time with the megabank, they experienced financial difficulties and found their bank to be decidedly absent. So, they brought their business back to us, and as a community bank, we worked with them to help them get back on their feet—because, as community bankers, we do what is right for our customers and the community.
2. **We are the lifeblood of small businesses.** Small business is what drives our national economy, and without community banks, these businesses would not be able to flourish. Take our actions around the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), where community banks took a leap of faith to provide a much-needed lifeline to small businesses nationwide. While we represent less than a quarter of total banking assets in the U.S., we made nearly 60% of the total PPP loan amount.
3. **We are the economic engines that make our communities hum.** Money that is deposited in a community bank gets reinvested back into that community through commercial loans, consumer mortgage loans and even municipal bonds. Money stays local and amplifies the financial standing of the community.
4. **We work from a longer-term perspective, not the latest quarterly results.** We want to improve our communities, because that is where we live and work. We give generously and support nonprofits with donations of money, leadership and volunteers.

In today’s environment, our industry is under assault from overzealous regulators, lawmakers, subsidized competitors and other companies looking to enter the banking space. Now more than ever, it is essential that we come together to fight for community banking.

One way to bolster our efforts is to support the Independent Community Bankers Political Action Committee, or ICBPAC. Community banks have an amazing reputation on Capitol Hill, and we need to leverage it to have our voices heard and drive necessary change. In short, we need more bankers involved and giving.

I encourage you to get engaged in whatever way you can with ICBA this year. Working together, we can protect our communities and make a positive difference in every area we serve.

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Connect with Robert **@RobertMFisher**

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**My Top 4**

My closing advice as chairman: Don’t put off your bucket list items. Here are mine:

1. Travel more globally.
2. Go parachuting.
3. Learn to play the guitar.
4. Drive as many cool cars as possible.