It’s all Kumbaya at the Capitol these days. What, you may ask, is Kumbaya? Some of us who are old enough and grew up in certain faith traditions may remember this spiritual classic. Not to denigrate anyone’s taste in music, but I always found the song a bit cloying. Typically, it would be sung around a campfire with a college-age student strumming a guitar surrounded by teenagers wishing they were anywhere else in the universe at that moment. At least that’s how I remember it.

So, Kumbaya is a song. But no one is really sure what the word means. Seriously. Scholars have tried to nail it down, but the best they can come up with is that it is a pidgin English word, derived from the language of the Gullah and meaning “come by here.” If I were being fair and kind, which I would prefer not to be based on my historical experiences with the song, I would say it is a calm and peaceful hymn appealing to the Almighty to help those in need.

In politics, it has developed a whole different meaning. One may hear politicians and political commentators speaking of “a Kumbaya moment” — usually, but not always, derisively. The Urban Dictionary, which is a website not to be frequented except when completely necessary (My work computer blocked it!), defines it thusly: “to engage in a show of unity and harmony with one’s opponents or enemies; frequently used in a disparaging or sarcastic sense.”

Despite that meaning, I am using it now in its more positive application. Kumbaya has come to the Capitol. And what a relief! In February, the (Democratic) governor proposed a budget that was met with statements of general approval by Republican leaders. Both sides admit that there are slight differences here and there, but generally they do not foresee the type of budget battle that has become the norm.

Things are so warm and fuzzy in Harrisburg that one of the governor’s initiatives is being led by the president of the PA Chamber of Business and Industry and the president of the state AFL-CIO and has been endorsed by House and Senate Republican and Democratic leadership. It involves much-needed workforce development.

Of course, there are vexing issues on the horizon, including perennial and controversial social issues, where compromise is often hard to find. There will be intense debates, but none of these will hinder work on the one essential piece of legislative business: the budget. (See “On the Hill: The Fifth Season,” The Pennsylvania Lawyer, September/October 2018)

This has all made me quite anxious. I can only think of quite graphic imagery to illustrate my nervousness. Imagine a mistreated dog that is finally rescued by a loving owner. Then imagine the owner going to pet the dog and the dog cringes. I feel like the cringing dog.

PBA’s agenda will require hard work, but it does not usually invoke the type of conflict seen on other legislative matters, sales tax on legal services excepted, which, by the way, is not a hot issue right now. I think the current atmosphere of Kumbaya is holding the whole property tax elimination battle at bay. Of course, if I feel a disruption in the Force (I know I am mixing metaphors), our members will be the first to know.

The PBA is working on some initiatives that will be appealing to diverse practice areas within our membership. Two top priorities are making it easier for fiduciaries to gain access to digital assets and assisting military personnel with child custody matters when they are subject to a rapid deployment. There are others, but I will save them for the next column.

They say courage is not about lacking fear, but, rather, it is about confronting fear and not letting it stop you from taking action. Following that line of reasoning, I have booked a vacation for the last week in July. (June 30 is the budget deadline, which has been missed many times over the last 10 or so years.) “Kumbaya!”

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