

President's Column

Robert J. Torres, Jr.

Warmest Greetings colleagues and *Court Review* readers!

It is my honor to serve as president of the American Judges Association and to infuse it with my signature energy and look forward to an eventful year. We were certainly off to an ideal start, with Kaua'i, Hawaii serving as the venue for our 2018 Annual Educational Conference. I am sure you all enjoyed the action-packed schedule of events, magnificent scenery, and the spirit of *Aloha* that Hawai'i and her people extended to us during our stay. We will aspire to expand the AJA fellowship and to provide relevant learning opportunities for our members throughout the year.

Someone once advised that the difference between a good speaker and a poor speaker is a comfortable nap. Well, we left no chance for a nap in Kaua'i! The annual conference featured outstanding speakers who delivered a world-class event reflective of AJA's high standards of excellence and commitment to judicial education

The conference theme, *Ke Ala Pono* – Path to Justice, focused on delivering a program that delved into issues affecting the delivery of justice, with applicability and interest to judges from all spectrums. Besides Dean Erwin Chemerinsky's annual conference update on the United States Supreme Court, we were privileged to hear from the Hon. Mark E. Recktenwald, Chief Justice, Supreme Court of Hawai'i, and the Hon. Randal G. B. Valenciano, Chief Judge, Fifth Circuit Court, Kaua'i.

Faculty from the University of Hawai'i at Manoa, William S. Richardson School of Law, covered important legal issues for those of us living in multicultural societies. Professor Seth Stoughton's plenary session on police-worn body cameras helped us to better understand the technology's potential benefits, limitations, and policy and legal implications.

I would be remiss if I did not extend kudos to my Education co-chair, the Hon. Catherine Carlson, for her dedication, perseverance, and attention to detail in planning the conference.

The attraction and value of attending our annual educational conferences was evidenced by the significant number of attendees, including nearly fifty judges from the Philippine Judges Association. I wish to thank the Court Administrator of the Philippine Judiciary, the Hon. Jose "Midas" Marquez, for facilitating and approving their attendance. By bringing together judges from many different jurisdictions, we increase the value of AJA membership by providing a vast network of international and national judicial peers with whom we may collaborate and form friendships for years to come.

An added benefit of the conference was a traditional-style luau fundraiser organized by the American Judges Foundation and led by AJF President and AJA President-elect Hon. Pete Sferrazza. Attendees of the luau enjoyed a delicious Hawaiian

feast, which included Kalua pig wrapped in *ti* leaves and cooked to perfection in an earthen *imu* oven. Attendees were lulled by the soothing sounds of Hawaiian music and treated to performances from Hawai'i, Tahiti, Samoa, and *Aotearoa* (New Zealand). AJF is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit entity, formed to promote judicial and civic education. The successful fundraiser supports AJF's important work and its continued financial contributions to worthwhile projects.

I wish to thank the Hon. Catherine Shaffer for her leadership during that past year as AJA President. I could not take on this monumental task of serving as your incoming president without her assistance. My appreciation extends equally to other AJA stalwarts — the Hon. Russel Otter, Hon. Kevin Burke, Hon. John Conery, Hon. Mary Celeste, Hon. Steve Leben, Hon. Elizabeth Hines, Hon. Elliot Zide, and Hon. Yvette Alexander. Thank you all for your insight and continued collaboration. Two rising stars, the Hon. Gayle Williams-Byers and Hon. Veronica Alicea-Galvin, also deserve much recognition and thanks for making AJA more accessible to members via social media.

As we continue the AJA mission of Making Better Judges®, I join the AJA Executive Committee and Board of Governors as they strive to enhance the value of AJA membership. Together we'll work to advance diversity in our organization by collaborating with other national court-oriented organizations. With this objective, the 2019 midyear conference April 11-13 in Savannah, Georgia will include a cooperative session with the National Judicial College on procedural fairness. Furthermore, the 2019 annual education conference we've scheduled in September in Chicago at the iconic Drake Hotel will be a joint conference with the Supreme Court of Illinois Judicial College.

The AJA has provided top-quality educational conferences, scholarships to the National Judicial College, and other valuable benefits to its members. Membership also includes quarterly issues of *Court Review*. I extend sincere gratitude to our editors, the Hon. Julie Kunce Field, Hon. Devin Odell, Hon. David Prince, and Professor Eve Brank for their selfless dedication to ensuring the journal remains relevant for the AJA with research-based articles, essays, book reviews, and interviews on topics relevant to judges and the judicial system.

This year, we can further raise the bar for the AJA by implementing technology to bolster membership, revitalize committees, and connect with members unable to attend the educational conferences. With a little more effort and ingenuity, we can promote our standard of excellence and be **The Voice of the Judiciary®**. I believe the best way to succeed in this world is to act on the advice you give others. On that note, I thank you for your confidence and invite you join our objective to walk our AJA talk this year!

