

President's Column

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From time to time it is appropriate to discuss our association and to reaffirm its reasons for existence.

The American Judges Association is an independent organization: it is open, but limited, to all judicial officers regardless of training. The membership operates as a single body, without division by jurisdiction. These defining characteristics create an association with focus on the institutional issues common to all courts and judges.

The mission of the association, common to all members, is to promote the effective administration of justice. To carry out this mission, the association operates in three ways. First, it provides leadership and a voice for judges. Second, it works with other organizations, both private and governmental. Third, it seeks to communicate and to cooperate with the public whom judges and the courts exist to serve.

The institutional issues of judges and courts during the Twentieth Century have been largely internal, focusing on operation and procedure. Subjects have included court unification, court management and administration, judicial selection, judicial education, and pleading and discovery practices.

More recently, however, judicial elections, public outcry and riots, calls for judicial impeachment, proposals for judicial term limits, and public surveys have refocused institutional interest to include external issues. It is no longer sufficient to effectively manage a docket, know the rules of evidence, provide an opportunity to be heard, and afford the process that is due. Today the issues include not only how courts and judges operate and decide cases, but also for whom they operate and how they perform their responsibilities. Thus, as the Twenty-first Century approaches, the institutional issues and concerns have clearly shifted to include not only an internal, but also an external, focus.

The overarching and obvious examples of this external focus are public trust and confidence, and judicial independence. Included, and certainly no less important, are diversity and ethnic equality, the costs of and access to the legal system, pro se representation, court performance, judicial evaluations and selection, and judicial isolation and outreach.

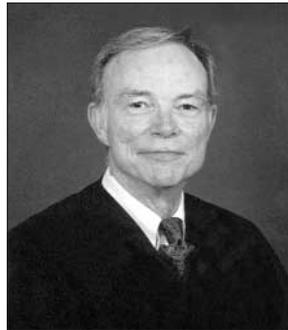
Restated more broadly, but perhaps more precisely, the institutional issues, now and for the foreseeable future, for courts and judges, include the relationship of the courts and the public they serve. That, I hope, is exactly where the institutional focus of this association will be as well.

Other leadership has already stepped forward. The National Center for State Courts and American Bar Association have joined to lead an effort to develop a national agenda. The

Conference of Chief Justices, Conference of State Court Administrators, National Association for Court Management and National Association of State Judicial Educators all have given it attention. Some state judicial systems, courts and judges also have begun notable efforts, but most judges and courts are notable for our failure to act.

The relationship of judges and courts with the public they exist to serve is an institutional issue that requires and deserves an institutional response. The American Judges Association is positioned to provide leadership for that effort.

Specifically, the association has advanced two new judicial leadership programs: Judicial Leadership for Diversity and Ethnic Equality, and the Judicial Leadership for Substance Abuse Reduction Strategy Initiative. The fundamental premise of each is the same: There are existing organizations with a substantial body of knowledge and practical court experience on the one hand, and, on the other hand, there are a great many judges and courts who can put this knowledge and experience to use. To date, however, there is little institutional leadership or commitment to disseminate and promote their use. The ultimate role of these programs is to do just that. Each program will endeavor to work



with existing organizations to create a plan, acquire funding, develop a curriculum and promote and manage its distribution. As the national agenda for public trust and confidence in the courts is finalized by the National Center and other groups, that agenda may also provide opportunities for comparable judicial leadership programs.

These issues are of concern to all judges and the membership of all judicial organizations, not just the American Judges Association. Judicial leadership must come from all judicial organizations if these efforts are to be truly credible and successful. To that end, the Judicial Division of the American Bar Association has been approached with the proposal for joint programs and has responded positively; similar initiatives will be extended to the National Association of Women Judges, to the Judicial Division of the National Bar Association, to the Judicial Division of the National Hispanic Lawyers Association, to the National Tribal Councils and to other judicial organizations with an interest in these issues.

These efforts to provide leadership and a voice for judges, by working with other like-minded organizations to communicate and cooperate with the public whom we all exist to serve, will carry out the mission of the American Judges Association, common to all judges, by promoting the effective administration of justice.