

# President's Column

Robert J. Torres, Jr.

Dear colleagues and *Court Review* readers!

This is the last column I will write as your president, and it has been an honor and a privilege to serve. Besides planning our well-renowned educational programs, over the past year, we focused on strengthening our committees by keeping them active and meeting regularly—whether in person at our conferences or through the numerous phone calls that spanned nine time zones and the International Date Line. We have been committed to bolstering membership while collaborating and partnering with other organizations to provide excellent educational opportunities. We continue to encourage diversity throughout our organization, and offer wellness and judicial family support to our members.

In April, we wrapped up our midyear meeting in Savannah, Georgia, where we partnered with the National Association of Drug Court Professionals (NADCP) to provide education sessions on Effective Judicial Practices and Court Interventions for Defendants with Substance Use Disorders and Therapeutic Jurisprudence Initiatives. The NADCP's Chief Executive Officer Carson Fox, Chief Operating Officer Terrence Walton, and Board of Directors Chair Michael Barrasse were panelists for the sessions, along with California Judge Richard Vlavianos. The National Judicial College also aligned with our efforts by providing a pre-conference course on Advanced Bench Skills: Procedural Fairness. It was a successful midyear meeting, and the efforts of Mary Celeste in getting the commitment from NADCP and NJC cannot be overlooked.

We are excited about our 59th Annual American Judges Association's Educational Conference in September, which will be a joint conference with the Supreme Court of Illinois Judicial College. The venue for the 2019 annual conference is the historic Drake Hotel in downtown Chicago, and we will be joined by 100 judges from the home state. The educational programs will examine issues that impact the administration of justice, judicial decision making, and emerging legal topics. On the list of social activities is a Chicago Cubs baseball game and the 5-star guided architecture cruise of the historic Chicago River. The 2019 Joint Conference Workgroup composed of AJA and Illinois members spent considerable time over the last year planning the education and social activities for what promises to be another successful program. I want to thank all Workgroup members for their contributions and specially recognize the efforts of Illinois Judge Neil Cohen and Anita C. Shore, J.D., of the Illinois Judicial Education Division.

Our education and conference committees have traditionally been the most active committees but because of the dynamic chairs and co-chairs, other standing committees are being more involved through frequent teleconference meetings and routine collaboration. The Judicial Wellness Committee chaired by Joseph Rossi helped develop content for a presentation on wellness and mindfulness by the former Director of the Federal Judicial Center, Judge Jeremy Fogel, and Judge Gerald Lebovits. The

Court Security committee, co-chaired by Eugene Lucci and Natalie Tyrell, are developing educational programs on personal judicial security and sovereign citizens issues for the 2020 Philadelphia conference. Jerrauld Jones, Tracy Brandeis-Roman, and Mangesh Duggal of the Criminal and Juvenile Justice committee are also working on topics for future conferences. The Diversity Committee, chaired by Yvette Alexander and Roxanne Song Ong, organized a presentation on Deliberative Decision Making that will be presented at the National Bar Association Judicial Council meeting in July and at the AJA Annual Conference in September.

Another committee that has been active is our Membership Committee co-chaired by Judge Elliott Zide. The committee has launched a new membership development campaign with strategies for attracting new members, restoring dropped members, and reducing attrition of members.

We have much to look forward to with our cross-cultural educational exchange to Cuba in February 2020, the AJA 2020 midyear meeting in Napa, the 2020 annual meeting in Philadelphia, the 2021 midyear meeting in San Antonio, Texas and the 2021 annual meeting in New Orleans jointly with the Louisiana Judicial College. Your participation in these conferences enhances AJA's diverse membership, which is the strength of our organization. Our efforts to promote and improve the effective administration of justice will only get easier as our committees strengthen and grow.

Our future president will have an amazing year—just as I did—because of the support, camaraderie, and capable group of judges within our organization. AJA strives to find exciting and adventurous ways to bring its members together for educational advancement, networking, and peer mentoring to “Make Better Judges.”

By the time this column is published, the Supreme Court will have completed its first term with the current group of justices. Some of these cases involve fundamental questions of citizenship and political participation. This includes *Lamone v. Benisek*, where the Court will review lower-court orders that Maryland must redraw its congressional district maps due to partisan gerrymandering, and *Department of Commerce v. New York*, which considers whether the 2020 census can include questions about citizenship that opponents allege will undermine Latino participation. The Court will also consider more technical questions, such as whether courts should defer to an agency's reasonable interpretation of its own ambiguous regulation (*Auer* deference), at issue in *Kisor v. Wilke*. The decisions in these cases and others will shape our nation and our courts for years to come.

Finally, to memorialize my last President's Column I requested the cover of *Court Review* be a painting of the Guam Judicial Center done by a retiring court employee and local artist Frank Perez. I hope you enjoy it, and I thank you all for allowing me to serve. I have become a better justice and court leader because of you.

