

# President's Column

Peter Sferrazza

Dear AJA Members:

Due to the current situation in New Orleans, Louisiana, because of Hurricane Ida and the pandemic, it was determined it was not possible to host the Annual Conference there. Therefore, the Annual Conference will be held virtually on October 4-6, 2021, and be hosted by the National Center for State Courts, as our Secretariat, in Williamsburg, Virginia.

The General Assembly will convene on October 6, 2021, at 9 am CDT. The Board of Governors meeting will follow at 10 am CDT and the new Executive Committee meeting at 11 am CDT. All meetings and education sessions will be held virtually by Zoom. Notices with links to register, join the meetings, and the agenda for the conference will be found on the AJA website. Please note all times listed on the agenda are in Central Time. We apologize if this issue did not reach you in a timely manner.

Our 2022 midyear conference is scheduled for April 26-27, 2022 in Napa, California. Make sure you sign up early because when we originally scheduled this, the rooms were sold out within a short period of time.

Our 2022 annual conference is scheduled for August 28-31, 2022 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

The AJA has not been idle during the pandemic. We have produced a number of webinars, held virtual meetings, adopted a strategic plan, and continued to produce this magnificent *Court Review*, thanks to the hard work of our editors and editorial board.

The AJA hosted and recorded the Rx4 Webinar Series consisting of four 75-minute educational webinars for American Judges Association (AJA) members and other interested judges. Recordings of the webinars were preserved and are hosted on the AJA website. Simply click on any of the webinars on our home page, and there will be links to all.

The four topics were selected in acknowledgment of the challenges facing the state courts due to the pandemic, and social unrest related to systemic racial inequality.

Topic One: "Relief" refers to steps courts have taken to respond to suspension of in-person hearings and jury trials, and judges and staff working remotely.

Topic Two: "Recovery" refers to the legal challenges and constitutional issues courts will confront as they attempt to recover from delayed and backlogged cases and respond effectively to the invocation of speedy trial rights by criminal defendants, and other issues. The speaker for this topic was Dean Erwin Chemerinsky, University of California at Berkeley School of Law.

Topic Three: "Reform" refers to institutional and systemic changes that resulted from, and outlived, the immediate impact of the pandemic.

Topic Four: "Racial Justice and the State Courts." This webinar addressed the responsibility of judges and the state courts to take action to address persistent racial inequality, and the negative perceptions of the justice system among communities of color.

Another successful webinar was "The Role of the Judiciary in Preserving Our Constitutional Democracy" This webinar was cosponsored by the National Judicial College. It examined how dozens of judges fulfilled their obligation to rule impartially on the 2020 election challenges and what we as members of the judiciary can do to preserve judicial independence. Berkeley Law Dean Erwin Chemerinsky was our lead panelist. He discussed the cases that were considered by or appealed to the United States Supreme Court relative to the 2020 election.

National Judicial College President Benes Aldana moderated a panel of experts on the challenges filed in four key states.

Nevada Attorney General Aaron Ford, former majority leader of the Nevada State Senate, discussed the cases that were filed in the state of Nevada challenging the 2020 election results.

Professor Neil Kinkopf, former staff member for the U.S. Senate Judiciary committee, gave his perspective on the cases that were filed in the state of Georgia challenging the 2020 election results and the aftermath.

Retired Arizona Chief Justice Scott Bales shared his insight on the Arizona election challenges. Scott Bales served on the Arizona Supreme Court for fourteen years, including as Chief Justice from July 2014 until July 2019.

Attorney Mark Aronchick represented Pennsylvania governments in over 25 cases during the 2020 election cycle, in federal and state courts, at trials and appeals. He is the attorney who took on Rudy Giuliani, when he appeared post-election

AJA sponsored "Digital Evidence & The Evolving Court Record." This webinar examined how COVID transformed the way courts operate with virtual hearings and trials.

In addition, the Executive Committee has adopted a draft strategic plan. The AJA will continue developing this plan throughout the year with working groups, board participation, and further surveys of the membership. We are looking for volunteers to work on implementing the strategic plan. If you are interested, a copy of the draft strategic plan can be viewed on our website.

Thanks again for your continued support.

