

President's Column

A NEW YEAR: NEW CHALLENGES, ABUNDANT OPPORTUNITIES

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Greetings my fellow jurists and *Court Review* readers,

I am overjoyed to begin my term serving as the 60th president of the American Judges Association. It is the rich history of this Association that humbles and makes me feel honored to lead at this challenging juncture in our journey. I view it as a privilege to be given the opportunity and responsibility to protect and preserve our legacy. I stand on the shoulders of 59 other AJA presidents who have guided this Association thus far, five of which hail from my great state of Louisiana: Judge G. Randall Whitmeyer, Judge Oliver S. Delery, Judge James F. McKay III, Judge Toni M. Higginbotham, and Judge John Conery. Realizing that the success of the American Judges Association is the result of the tireless efforts of so many others, I salute them for their tenacity and leadership. Their leadership is a model for us all. Our accomplishments of yesterday can only be sustained by the vigilance of today; therefore, we must all labor incessantly to sustain our beloved AJA.

Starting from when I joined the AJA in 1995, this journey has been an amazing one. I have had the opportunity to witness the growth and development of this great Association. The challenges we face as a judiciary are still ever present but we are equipped not only to overcome the challenges but also to soar while doing so and emerge stronger than ever. The AJA in 1995 mirrored the judiciary, which was predominantly white and predominantly male, and now the AJA continues to mirror the judiciary with our membership being more diverse and inclusive. With this in mind I am confident the future of the American Judges Association is bright. Two of the goals and objectives of this Association are to provide and promote education for the judiciary and the public and to improve the effective administration of justice.

The years of 2020 and 2021 have proven that we are stronger together and no matter the challenge we can adjust and make the best out of any situation. I applaud Judge Peter Sferrazza for his devoted service as our President for those two years. Thank you for displaying such resilience, grit, and commitment. He took the helm of this Association and marched forward despite COVID. He didn't blink when asked to serve two terms, one of which was in a total virtual world and entirely under pandemic protocols. Instead he led with passion, like a true leader does. Thank you Judge Sferrazza for making the adjustments and assuring that the AJA would not only survive but thrive through this pandemic. Although COVID is still a force to be reckoned with, we must remain hypervigilant and ready to pivot in so many ways to achieve our American Judges Association goals and objectives. Through hard work and dedication, we will achieve these goals.

We were all disappointed in October by not being able to have our in-person 2021 Annual Conference in New Orleans, Louisiana. COVID and Hurricane Ida were the sole contributors to the executive committee's decision to have a virtual annual conference. To protect the safety and wellbeing of our member-

ship, we had no other option except to have a virtual conference. Despite not being able to gather in person for the second year in a row, we were still able to provide excellent educational sessions to our members and also handle the business of this Association through a virtual conference. The educational programs covered subjects from Self-Care to Digital Proceedings, from Judicial Independence to Judicial Security, from Evidence and the Future of Justice to the Mind of the Batterer. As always, Dean Chemerinsky's United States Supreme Court Update was excellent. No stone was left unturned. We emerged from that virtual conference with new and innovative ideas and tools to use daily in our courtrooms as we dispense justice during these most challenging times. Thank you to Judge George Grasso, Justice Bob Torres, and the entire educational committee for stepping up and making the necessary adjustments to ensure a well-balanced and exemplary virtual education program and conference.

Now we look forward to getting together in person at our midyear conference in beautiful Napa Valley, California. The dates are April 26 and 27, 2022. The educational sessions promise to be exhilarating and enlightening. Mark your calendars now, you don't want to miss it!

The American Judges Association works untiringly to preserve the independency of the judiciary. Judges must be free to do their jobs without fear of repercussions or sanctions. We are an independent branch of government and should be treated as such always. This country is currently addressing very important issues of race, voter rights, and redistricting. Our role, as judges, concerning these issues will play out in the courtroom. Most importantly as judges our job is to ensure that everyone is treated equally under the law, and the scales of justice are not tilted. A job we all conscientiously perform. The best judges are the ones who really try to achieve justice, realizing that justice is not a destination but instead a journey. According to Socrates, "Four things belong to a judge: to hear courteously; to answer wisely; to consider soberly; and to decide impartially." I tend to agree. I continue to strive to exemplify an unwavering commitment to justice and fundamental fairness, and I will serve as your president with the same goals in mind.

As the voice of the judiciary, our strength is in our membership. I do not intend to do this alone. We must all give of our time, talents and treasures. We must all work together for the betterment of this incredible Association, our cities, our states, our nation, and this world. Despite COVID and the adversity it has brought to us, we still have many blessings in our lives and many things for which to be thankful. We should focus more on our blessings and those things for which we are thankful. My dad would always tell us "What doesn't kill you will make you stronger." I am truly stronger today! I look forward to our continued progress as the voice of the judiciary. Thank you all for the service you give every day and the incredible work you do in the name of justice! It is my honor to serve as your 60th president.

