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President's Column

Jim McKay

Some 27 years ago when I was first elected to the criminal bench in New Orleans, I was approached at my swearing in by a very distinguished, long-serving judge. He said to me, "Son, the first thing you have to do is become a member of the American Judges Association. It will be like having a friend on the bench because when you sit you need all the help you can get." That distinguished judge was the late Oliver Delery, who was then a member of the American Judges Association and later became its president.

I learned two things from that encounter. First, unfortunately, he was right—a presiding judge on his or her bench has very few friends. Second, and fortunately, he was also right that the American Judges Association became one of those few friends.

Being sworn in as the 48th president of the American Judges Association last fall was certainly the crowning event of my judicial career. It is more special as this is our 50th anniversary, our golden year. I appreciate the trust and confidence that my colleagues from all over this North American continent have bestowed upon me by electing me president, and can honestly confess that I felt both excitement and trepidation at the tasks ahead.

The American people seem to have a love-hate relationship with their judicial system, and maybe that's the way it should be. However, when the judiciary faces this issue, we must face it and answer it with one voice. We consider ourselves, the American Judges Association, that voice. We are the "voice of the judiciary."[®] This mantle was not self-bestowed, but was earned after laboring in the judicial field for more 50 years. In 1959 we started our organization with a handful of judges and have grown to almost 2,500 today.

My pledge to this association is to strive to make sure that

we continue to be the voice of the judiciary in all corners of America. Attacks on the judiciary are common in this day and age. We will attempt to be at the forefront of these attacks with in-depth studies and hopefully in-depth answers.

This year is going to be especially challenging due to the downturn in our economy. The court systems of many states in this nation and many provinces in Canada will be faced with funding crises. This will impact membership and participation

for our organization and similar ones as well. We will have to consider a way to economize but still maintain the level of service that our association has grown accustomed to in the past. I know that the current board of governors and the executive committee team that I have chosen are up to the task.

As the expression goes, "No rest for the weary." On the first Tuesday after I took office,

my first official duty as the new AJA president was to attend the meeting of the Canadian Association of Provincial Court Judges in Calgary. I addressed the Canadian judges on problems facing the American Judges Association. I also had the opportunity to spend a great deal of time with their new president, Judge Gerald Meagher. Judge Meagher and I agreed to maintain close contact with each other to discuss similar problems facing both of our judicial organizations.

I urge all fellow AJA members to continue to faithfully read *Court Review*, our official AJA publication, as well as *Benchmark*, our newsletter, which is now produced in an electronic format in order to save costs. I look forward to all future publications of this journal to report to you the latest issues impacting our organization as well as my activities during the year.

God Bless.

