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Brian MacKenzie

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President's Column

A YEAR, A CHANGE, AND A CHALLENGE

Brian MacKenzie

They say what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas. Well, the American Judges Association (AJA) met this October in Las Vegas and nothing will simply stay there. The educational sessions gave those in attendance an in-depth look at important issues to the judiciary. There were sessions that dealt with every aspect of judging, including a presentation by Melissa Fitzgerald, former star of *West Wing* and current director of Justice for Vets, on veterans treatment courts. There was also time for a little fun, such as the fantastic AJA banquet featuring the Motown-infused music of InDemand, which had everyone dancing late into the night. Not only was the food and music wonderful, you would be amazed at how well some judges can dance. There was also a chance for judges spanning the United States and Canada to share their experiences and problems. All of those in attendance would agree that the conference helped make them a better judge.

The AJA exists to help make its members better judges. One of the ways it does this is through the annual educational conference, but we do so much more. We are the leading institution in North America on the important issue of procedural fairness. We will soon be offering a set of video-education sessions on this important issue. In addition, we have just produced six one-hour videos on judging and domestic violence that are available to any AJA member without cost. You can find a link to it on our website, www.amjudges.org.

Speaking of our website, you should check it out. It is filled with information that will help you as a judge. Our website hosts a lively and interesting blog (the AJA blog, blog.amjudges.org). There are also past issues of our journal, *Court Review*, where you can find articles about a broad range of legal issues. Of course those of you reading this column don't have to do that for the present issue—it's in your hands. Still, if you have missed or lost a past issue, it is there for you.



The AJA is also your voice when it comes to important issues affecting the judiciary. As your voice, the AJA issues white papers that are the standing position of our organization. These white papers issued in the name of our membership have impacted the international discussion on judging. Our white papers also can be found on the website.

Currently, the AJA is taking a serious look at how we can improve our organization to better help all of you. We are thinking long-term about our structure and how we can represent every judge in North America. We will be working to strengthen the relationship between Canadian and American judges, looking to expand our membership, and thinking of ways to improve our already excellent conferences.

Our organization seeks to reach and to represent every judge. We want to be the voice for every judge, but to do that we need your help.

We need an energetic membership, as sustaining a strong North American judicial organization is not an easy task.

Come to our Midyear Conference in Fort Meyers, Florida, in April and learn how to deal with the stress of being a judge. Or plan to attend our Annual Educational Conference in Seattle, Washington in September and join us for an in-depth discussion about procedural fairness, among other issues. Send an interesting tidbit to the AJA blog or offer to write a serious article for *Court Review*.

Do more than be a member. Join one of the many AJA committees and share your thoughts about making us all better judges. Think about running for the Board of Governors and working to grow the AJA. Get involved, if in no other way than by sending me an email with advice, asking me to share it with the membership. Lend us your voice, to strengthen our voice in the ongoing debate about role of judges. I hope you enjoy the rest of this issue of *Court Review* and when you set it down, you will take up the AJA.