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President's Column

CHANGING THE AMERICAN JUDGES ASSOCIATION

Brian MacKenzie

In my first column in *Court Review*, I wrote about how the American Judges Association (AJA) was taking a serious look at improving the Association. Since the annual meeting in Las Vegas, a number of committees have been thinking long-term about the organization's structure. The goals are to strengthen the relationship between Canadian and American judges, to expand membership so that it reflects all of the judiciary, and to improve the already excellent conferences. At the midyear meeting held at Fort Myers, Florida, the Executive Committee and the Board of Governors reviewed proposed changes to the bylaws.

The most important proposal would change how judges are elected to the Board of Governors. The current system, devised in the 1950s, created 14 districts based upon the number of active judges in the district. By way of example, a state like New York has two representatives on the Board of Governors, while Alabama, Georgia, Florida, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico have shared representation. Besides this basic unfairness in state representation, a structure based on active judges is difficult to change when judges from a particular state are not as active as they once were. Another problem is that judges from Canada have no separate representation. Under our current structure, they are part of districts made up of multiple states and provinces. This creates the possibility that no Canadian judge will serve on the Board of Governors.

These new districts would be based on population and structured in the following way: District 1 (Canada) would be composed of all of the provinces of Canada; District 2 (North-eastern) would be composed of the states of Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, and the District of Columbia; District 3 (Southeastern) would be composed of the states of Virginia, West Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Kentucky, Tennessee, and the territories of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands; District 4 (North-central) would be composed of the states of Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa, Missouri, and Kansas; District 5 (South-central) would be composed of the states of Alabama, Mississippi, Texas, Arkansas, Oklahoma,

Nebraska, New Mexico, Utah, and the country of Mexico; and finally District 6 (Western) would be composed of the states of Colorado, Washington, Idaho, Montana, Alaska, Oregon, Wyoming, Arizona, California, Nevada, Hawaii, and the territories of Guam, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands.

All members of the Executive Committee would be members of the Board of Governors, as would the historian and parliamentarian. In addition, three new at-large positions, appointed by the president, would be created. These changes increase total membership of the Board of Governors from 42 to a maximum of 49. The primary reason for this slight increase is to ensure diversity in the AJA.

The provision in the current bylaws that all past presidents in good standing are voting members of the Board of Governors is left unchanged. Also left unchanged are the staggered three-year terms for the Board of Governors. However, consideration is being given to

eliminating term limits.

Other changes include the elimination of the district representative and the requirement that two of the president's appointments to the Executive Committee must come from members of the Board of Governors. The provision that allows the Board of Governors to elect one member from the body to the Executive Committee remains unchanged. Certain standing committees contained in the bylaws, such as the student essay committee, will be eliminated.

All of these proposals are just that—proposals. Neither the Executive Committee nor the Board of Governors has the authority to change the bylaws, but I think it's important for you, as members, to know what was discussed. This summer you will receive an e-mail directing you to the AJA website, where you will find a proposed draft of the new bylaws. There will be a 30-day comment period after the bylaws are posted to allow for input from our entire membership. These proposals will be presented at our annual membership meeting in Seattle on October 6, 2015.

These changes are important and can potentially guide our organization for the next 50 years, so I would urge you to read the proposals and then add your voice to the discussion.

