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President's Column

Peter Sferrazza

On September 17, 2020, the American Judges Association Board of Governors met by Zoom. They approved the annual budget, reviewed the membership, and discussed future meetings. The annual conference previously scheduled for Philadelphia will now be held in New Orleans at the Omni Royal from October 2 until October 7, 2021. The in-person Executive Committee meeting will be held by Zoom on January 16, 2021.

In light of the continuing pandemic, the fact that many of our judges will not be able to travel to San Antonio, the likelihood that social distancing and masking will still be in effect, and the lack of a proven vaccine, the Executive Committee will review the status of the 2021 Midyear Meeting in San Antonio and cancel if necessary. It is currently scheduled for April 14 to April 17, 2021.

In the interim, the AJA will host and record a Webinar Series consisting of four 75-minute educational webinars for American Judges Association (AJA) members, and other interested judges. Recordings of the webinars will be preserved and hosted on the AJA website, making them available to judges, the broader state court community, and the general public.

The four topics have been selected with regard to the pandemic challenges facing the state courts, and the United States more broadly, due to the pandemic and social unrest related to systemic racial inequality. Three of the four topics will echo President Franklin Roosevelt's response to the Great Depression, which focused on Relief, Recovery, and Reform. The fourth will address the steps state courts, and especially judges, can take to ensure that the state justice system provides equal justice to all.

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 proposed guest speaker for this topic is Dean Erwin Chemerinsky, University of California at Berkeley School of Law.

Topic Three: "Reform" refers to institutional and systemic changes that may result from and outlive the immediate impact of the pandemic, such as long-term budget constraints, the interests

of court customers and attorneys wanting to retain remote hearings and other conveniences after they are no longer required, and other issues.

Topic Four: "Racial Justice and the State Courts." This webinar will address 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.

The webinars are tentatively scheduled to be conducted by the end of 2020.

On a sadder note, the American Judges Association (AJA), the Voice of the Judiciary, joins the nation and the world in mourning the passing of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg. The AJA sends our

prayers and condolences to her family and hope they find some comfort in the legacy and memories she left behind. We affectionately remember her as "Notorious RBG," a moniker she was proud to share with the late rapper, Notorious B.I.G., because they were both "straight out of Brooklyn."

Ruth Bader Ginsburg was a judicial icon who changed the world for American women in her life-long mission for gender equality. She worked tirelessly to break down the roles that society assigns to women and men by using the Constitution, her impartial and fair mind, and her understanding of justice. Her dissent in the Lilly Ledbetter case led to President Barack Obama signing the Lilly Ledbetter equal pay act into law.

She was the second woman appointed to the United States Supreme Court. She was a champion of equal rights for women—and all people regardless of sex, gender identity, race, color, creed, or national origin. She was brilliant and strategic, wise and just, and her commanding presence and fair insight will be missed. Her love of the law made her a beloved jurist and an inspiration to many across the world.

Ruth Bader Ginsberg was a mother, a United States Supreme Court Justice, and a wife—three jobs that would be daunting and close to impossible for anyone. Yet, she was unwavering in her advancement of equality, no matter the barriers and social norms she confronted.

Let us honor her by continuing her mission toward equality in all facets of our American lives and remind ourselves that even the smallest figure can command a mighty presence and change our world. In honor of Justice Ginsburg's memory, the AJA affirms our commitment to advancing equal justice for all.

Thank you, RBG.

