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President's Column

Peter Sferrazza

Dear American Judges Association Members,

We hope this letter finds you well. We were sad to announce the cancellation of the 2021 Spring Midyear Conference in San Antonio. The Executive Committee felt that it was in the best interest of our members to cancel due to the increasing number of Covid-19 cases, travel restrictions, and budgetary issues. However, we look forward to having the 2021 Annual Conference in New Orleans, Louisiana.

In the interim AJA is hosting 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.

On November 16, 2020 Dean Erwin Chemerinsky, University of California at Berkeley School of Law, spoke on 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. That webinar is posted to our website.

Our next webinar was conducted on Friday, January 15, 2021 from 3:00-4:15 p.m. EST / 12:00-1:15 p.m. PST. Presenters were Judge George Grasso, Supervising Judge of Bronx County Criminal Court (New York), and David Slayton, Director of the Texas Office of Court Administration. This webinar panel discussion highlighted the steps courts have taken to resume suspended in-person hearings and jury trials, to adjust to judges and staff working remotely, and other issues.

In lieu of an in-person Spring Conference, the Executive Committee and the Board will conduct its business meetings via Zoom on April 15, 2021. The AJA is currently planning an education webinar for our virtual conference in April. Benes Aldana indicated the National Judicial College is willing to collaborate and will allow us to use their facilities to broadcast the webinar.

The theme of the webinar will be "The Role of the Judiciary in Preserving Our Constitutional Democracy." We hope to have the lead counsel and the judges who decided key cases in the state and federal courts. The states that we have tentatively identified are Georgia, Pennsylvania, Nevada, Arizona, and perhaps Wisconsin and Michigan. We will ask Professor Chemerinsky to cover the U.S. Supreme Court's role in the Texas and other cases.

We are proposing 3 one-hour sessions starting with the opening remarks and the coverage of the U.S. Supreme Court. The remaining 2 sessions will include two or three states per session depending on the response that we get.

Congratulations to Justice Robert Torres for securing funding from Reuters in the amount of \$5,000 for our midyear and

\$5,000 for our annual. Hopefully, some of this money can be used to defray the cost of the proposed webinars.

I will work with Justice Lidia Stiglich and Marcus Reinkensmeyer to coordinate the participants from Nevada and Arizona. Judge Vince Johnson will help us with Pennsylvania, and Judge George Grasso has volunteered to work with Alisa Kim to identify participants from Georgia. I asked Judge Kevin Burke and Judge Libby Hines if they could help us identify appropriate participants from Wisconsin and Michigan. Any suggestions or volunteers are welcome.

We will invite Chief Justice Roberts to do the opening address. The Canadian Judiciary will also be invited to welcome us. They can prerecord their opening addresses so they will not be limited to a specific date. Any help in securing their participation will be appreciated.

The AJA conducted a half-day strategic planning session during the association's Midyear Conference in Phoenix, Arizona, on May 2, 2020. Present for planning session were approximately 40 judges from various states and representatives of the National Center for State Courts (NCSC).

The planning session was facilitated by Marcus W. Reinkensmeyer, Director of Court Services for the Administrative Office of the Courts (Supreme Court of Arizona) and Past President of the National Association for Court Management.

Following an overview on the importance of organizational development and a brief presentation on the Moving Forward Strategic Planning Process, the session participants reviewed the following AJA Goals and Objectives, as delineated in the association's Strategic Plan:

1. Provide and promote education for the judiciary and the public.
2. Improve the effective administration of justice.
3. Be a leading voice of the judiciary.
4. Enhance participation and services to AJA members in order to retain and increase membership.

The participants expressed strong support for these goals and objectives.

The Executive Committee voted to follow up on our strategic plan and work began at our meeting on January 16, 2021.

Hopefully, everyone has received the link to our survey questions and has responded.

Thank you for your continuing support of AJA. We hope you have a very wonderful holiday season!

Warm wishes,

Judge Peter Sferrazza
Reno, NV

