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President's Column Planning for the Future of the American Judges Association Vol. 58, No. 3

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President's Column

Planning for the Future of the American Judges Association

Yvette Mansfield Alexander

Serving as President of the American Judges Association (AJA) has been the pinnacle of my legal career. Being President of the AJA is a time-consuming and demanding volunteer job which I could not have done without the advice and counsel of so many. First and foremost, thank you to my family for your consistent support and love. A huge thank you to my Louisiana Judges for their unwavering support. A special thanks to Justice Piper Griffin, Judge Sheva Sims and Judge Kern Reese for serving on the executive committee with me. Kudos to the Executive Committee for their commitment and zeal. Thank you for your deep concern for the well-being of this Association. Serving with the members of this Executive Committee who were the epitome of professionalism and collegiality made my job most enjoyable and satisfying.

This past year has been one of the most delightful, satisfying, exciting and challenging years of my life. Over the course of the year, I have had the opportunity to travel this nation representing the AJA. Much like Johnny Cash (yes I listen to Johnny Cash), "I've been everywhere man!" Overall, the AJA has had a very productive year. Our top focus for this year has been membership and making sure our financial stability is sound. Thanks to our membership chair, Judge Sheva Sims, our membership has grown more than twenty percent. Thanks to our Treasurer, Justice James Hardesty, our financial stability is strong. We managed to have two very successful in person conferences with outstanding educational sessions after two years of no in person conferences at all. I believe people were just happy to see each other in person and not on Zoom! Thank you to everyone who played a role in the success of these conferences (especially the attendees!). A special thank you to the Education Committee and its Chair, Justice Robert Torres. The educational sessions were both invigorating and thought provoking. I applaud the Chair of our recent Philadelphia conference, Judge Charles Hayden, and the co-chair Judge Vincent Johnson, on an outstanding job well done.

The underlying strength of the AJA will be tested in the upcoming years. Still regaining our footing following the height of Covid-19 restrictions, leadership will be the key to our success or failure. Looking at the future leadership of the Association, I am confident that we are destined for success! But they cannot do it alone. What one thing are you doing to improve the AJA? Anything worth joining is worth investing your time, talents and treasures in making it better.

Join the Board of Governors-the policy making arm of the American Judges Association. They meet at least two times a year, once at midyear and then at the annual meeting. Since Covid we have all discovered zoom so there may be intermittent meetings on zoom. The Board of Governors' terms are two years. You can contribute in determining the direction of the AJA. The meetings are educational, interesting and meaningful. You will make friends from all over this country and have the opportunity

to work with outstanding judges. When Declarations of Candidacy open up next year, consider putting your name in for your district. You can make a difference. Become a part of *Court Review*. If you like to write, consider submitting an article. It could provide you an opportunity to be published. Get involved! You will meet some of the smartest, nicest, most well intentioned people and you will be enriched. So declare your candidacy for the Board of Governors. Chair or join a committee. Write an article! Enhance your experience as a judge. It will make you feel that you have done something for yourself.

To succeed in today's legal world requires hard work, perseverance, and critical thinking. Which of course these things can lead to high levels of stress. Because our jobs are most times stressful, we must focus on our well-being. Our health, both physical and mental, is of the utmost importance. I earnestly ask each of you to make sure your well-being is first and foremost a part of your daily routine. Every day I challenge myself to find something inspirational. I challenge you to do the same.

Despite the shifting landscape, there is one constant. Equal Justice for ALL! We have an enduring commitment to the rule of law. The same law should be applied to everyone. Everyone should have access to justice (our court system). We all swore an oath to uphold the constitution and everyone should do so. We must commit to the impartial administration of justice for ALL! Our job is to render fair and impartial decisions to ensure all litigants receive equal protection under the law. Justice doesn't just happen, we must work daily toward this goal. Each of us brings a unique perspective to the judiciary based upon our backgrounds, life's lessons and experiences. I love bringing people together to holistically have an impact on justice. Together we empower.

When you leave a place, your intent should be to always leave it better than you found it. I am very pleased to report that this Association is in a better position today. I look forward to helping the future leadership in continuing this growth. The reality of a one year term is that you can only build on what your predecessor has done and lay a foundation for what your successor will do. It is all about the legacy - the ones we follow and the one we leave.

The American Judges Association is fortunate to have such committed leaders. So I will end this message as I began my first message and this year. Thank you all for the service you give every day and the incredible work you do in the name of justice! It has been an honor and a privilege to serve as your 60th President. May the work I've done speak for me!

EDITORS NOTE: At the recent Annual Conference of the American Judges Association in Philadelphia, Judge Alexander was unanimously elected as President for another year in 2022-23.

