

President's Column

Paul Beighle

One of the many pleasant tasks of the presidency is representing AJA at various conferences, symposia and joint task force meetings. Following the annual meeting in Orlando last year, our first member from Mexico, Chief Justice Julio Patino of Vera Cruz invited me to represent AJA at the 22nd annual National Congress of Tribunales Superiores de Justice in Morelia, Mexico.

This was a particularly special honor for AJA because no foreign judges had previously been invited to participate. Justice Patino, president of the Congress, was the kindest of hosts, thoughtfully providing a capable interpreter who accompanied us to all the events. I attended the working sessions of the justices and learned a great deal about the administration of justice in Mexico and about the issues of particular importance to the judiciary in each of the states.

Our visit was enhanced by meeting many judges and establishing ties with their organization. We hope that the contact will lead to increased participation in AJA activities by the judges of Mexico. We extend our special thanks to Justice Patino, his delightful wife, Martha, and to our interpreter, Citlali.

In keeping with the international theme, I would ask AJA members to give some thought to the following issue. We actively seek the membership and participation of judges from Canada and Mexico, and our efforts have brought us members from both countries. Judge Shirley Strickland-Saffold is to be commended for inviting Justice Patino into the AJA. Those members are from the *North American continent* but are not from *America* as we typically think of it.

In order to be more inclusive as an organization, we should give some thought to a name change that would be indicative of our international composition. I have appointed an ad hoc committee, chaired by Judge Sandy Elden, to study the feasibility of adopting a name that would reflect the broader scope of the organization. If you have any thoughts on the matter, or any suggestions, please submit them to Judge Elden for inclusion in his report.

Another major event at which I represented AJA was the national Conference on Public Trust and Confidence in the Justice System, held May 13-15 in Washington, D.C. Sponsors of the symposium included the Conference of Chief Justices, the Conference of State Court Administrators, the American Bar Association and the League of Women Voters. The National

Center for State Courts was the coordinating agency for the conference.

About five hundred participants took part in the program. They included judges, lawyers, court administrators/managers and citizens from various interested groups. AJA attendees included Judge Terry Elliott, Judge Valorie Vega, Judge Steve Leben and Judge Bob Pirraglia. Of course, each of the state chief justices is automatically a member of AJA, and many of them led their state's delegation. The three purposes of the conference were to identify the critical issues affecting public perception, to develop strategies for dealing with the issues and to identify methods for implementing those strategies.

The most critical issues were identified as (1) unequal treatment; (2) the high cost of access to the justice system, (3) lack of public understanding of the justice system and (4) unfair and inconsistent judicial process. The principal strategies for addressing the issues were identified as (1) improving education and training (of both the public and the judiciary); (2) making the courts more inclusive and out-reaching; (3) improving external communication; and (4) providing swift, fair justice.

The issues of public trust and confidence will be matters that national organizations such as AJA will be asked to work on over the coming years. AJA, consisting of judges at all levels of the judiciary, is in a perfect position to be an active, influential participant in the

process. At our annual meeting in Cleveland in October, Chief Justice Thomas A. Zlaket of Arizona, a co-chair of the conference, will address us on the issues raised there. I look forward to his address and promise on behalf of our organization that we will work with the implementation committee to advance the cause of improving public trust and confidence in the judicial system.

As a final note, let me direct your attention to the balance of the program for the Cleveland conference, October 10-15, 1999. Judge Strickland-Saffold and her conference committee, and Judge Jeffrey Rosinek and his education committee, have put together a program that will be educational, informative and entertaining. The speakers are all first-rate and the topics stimulating. We will once again have a vendor's show and a silent auction.

Cleveland will be an exciting city. Don't miss it.



AJA President Paul Beighle, second from right, attended a national meeting of judges in Mexico at the invitation of Chief Justice Julio Patino of Vera Cruz, Mexico. Also attending were Judge Beighle's wife, Jane McCormach, far left, a former president of the American Judges Foundation, and Justice Jan Flores, a member of AJA and of the Arizona Court of Appeals.