

President's Column

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I have just returned from the annual meeting of the Canadian Association of Provincial Court Judges (CAPCJ) in Whitehorse, Yukon Territory. I must first tell you what a wonderful group of judges I met in Canada. I made many new friends and was treated as an old friend. I later realized that this treatment was not due to my overwhelming personality but to the fact that the AJA is respected by Canadian judges and has a great reputation in Canada. Thus the AJA president is treated as a friend.

The Canadian judges were also very curious about the judiciary in the United States. Being the only American judge at the conference, I was peppered with many excellent questions about our court system. For example: How are American judges selected and retained? How are salaries determined and who pays you? What is your court's jurisdiction? Are your courts independent of legislative control?

These questions confirmed to me the value of having Canadian judges in the AJA. Their interests are very similar to those of us who live in the United States. In fact, I was asked similar questions when I traveled to the National College of Probate Judges conference in South Carolina last year. These are universal concerns to all judges, even though our courts may operate with vastly different traditions, laws, procedures, and jurisdiction. It is reassuring to know that we ask the same questions as our Canadian sisters and brothers and are troubled by the same problems that impact the judiciary, no matter the country. This is another advantage of a national judges organization: the exposure to the many different approaches other courts have to the similar issues we face. As I've asserted many times, going to a judicial conference is a learning experience at the formal education sessions and the evening receptions as well.

It was a great conference and special thanks go to Judge Robert Hyslop of Newfoundland and Labrador, then CAPCJ president, and Judge Heino Lilles of Whitehorse, our host and the new CAPCJ president, for their warm hospitality. Also, the three AJA members and governors from Canada who looked after me in Whitehorse—Judge Irwin Lampert of New Brunswick, Judge David Orr of Saskatchewan, and Judge Morton Minc of Quebec—deserve thanks. Each of them helped make my visit memorable.

The 5,500-mile trip was also unforgettable for another reason: the weather. Whitehorse is the territorial capital of the Yukon and is located at approximately the same latitude as Anchorage, Alaska. As you would expect for such a northern town, the average temperature for Whitehorse in late June is in the mid-60's. Unfortunately the entire Yukon was sweltering from record heat that pushed temperatures into the mid-90's every day. And the days are long in Whitehorse in late June: the sun doesn't set until 11 p.m. and is up again at 4 a.m., leaving little time for cooling. Of course, being familiar with Kansas City summers, I felt right at home. One problem, however, was that I packed for the crisp, bracing chill of the great North.



Bulky sweaters and long-sleeved shirts filled my luggage. I was saved by my AJA Hawaiian shirt, which was to be worn only on travel days. Instead it became the workhorse of my Yukon wardrobe and much admired by my Canadian counterparts. Extra special thanks go to Judge Dave Orr, who anticipated my comfort needs and reserved an air-conditioned room in a very modest hotel (laundromat conveniently located in the lobby) a few blocks from the elegant, yet inferno-like, conference hotel.

On my way to and from Whitehorse I visited Vancouver, site of our planned joint annual conference with CAPCJ in 2007. It is a spectacular, beautiful city with jagged 10,000-foot mountains rising up behind the glittering downtown, which seemingly has a wonderful ethnic restaurant on every corner. This means we'll have to devise an equally glittering educational program if we are to have any hope of keeping judges indoors. I look forward to sharing that challenge with our Canadian colleagues.

One final note: Mary McQueen, who has served as Washington's state court administrator, has been selected to succeed Roger Warren as president of the National Center for State Courts. She is a dynamic leader and an energetic spokesperson for our courts and will ably fill the big shoes of Judge Warren. I expressed to her the AJA's desire to continue our strong relationship with the National Center and she assured me that she shares the same goal. The AJA looks forward to working with her in the years to come.