

President's Column

A TRULY BROADER JUDICIAL HORIZON

Russell J. Otter

The American Judges Association recently completed its annual conference in Toronto, Canada, from September 26 to 29, 2016. The theme of the conference was comparative law in Canada and the United States. It focused on issues of common interest to judges on both sides of the border. These included such contemporary topics as “Judicial Ethics and Social Media,” “Wrongful Convictions Across Borders,” “Cannabis and the Greening of North America,” and “Judge’s Role in Ensuring Constitutional Right to Counsel.” All sessions featured leading academics and judges from Canada and the United States. On one panel we were pleased to have the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Guam, Robert Torres. A memorable highlight was the eloquent address by Justice Rosalie Abella of the Supreme Court of Canada. She emphasized the critical role of the judiciary in ensuring the protection of basic human rights in a democracy.

In an earlier address, when she was a member of the Court of Appeal of Ontario in 2000, she articulated the difference between the legislative and judicial branches of government as follows:

The judiciary has a different relationship with the public. It is accountable less to the public’s opinion and more to the public interest. It discharges that accountability by being principled, independent, and impartial. Of all the public institutions responsible for delivering justice, the judiciary is the only one for whom justice is the exclusive mandate. This means while legislatures respond of necessity of the urgings of the public, however we define it, judges, on the other hand, serve only justice.

(Justice Abella’s full remarks from that 2000 address can be found at <https://goo.gl/sRXF4n>.)

To discharge this critically important responsibility in our rapidly changing world, it is imperative that the judges benefit from continuing to attend and participate in excellent educational programs. For almost 57 years, the American Judges Association, the largest judges association in North America, has provided outstanding educational programming at its spring and fall conferences, by the publication of superb white papers including the highly acclaimed paper, “Procedural Fairness: A Key Ingredient in Public Satisfaction,” and by the publi-

cation of its quarterly journal, *Court Review*. AJA will continue to fulfil its mandate of Making Better Judges® with its upcoming midyear conference in Arlington, Virginia, from April 27 to 30, 2017.

Our next annual conference will be held in Cleveland, Ohio, from September 11 to 15, 2017, under the very capable leadership of our president-elect, Judge Catherine Shaffer. I urge judges in Canada and the United States to avail themselves of these golden educational opportunities.

At the conclusion of the Toronto conference, I had the distinct and historic honour of becoming the first Canadian to be president of the American Judges Association—a firm broadening of its judicial horizon. This reflects the international nature of AJA, as well as the many common goals of all state, provincial, and territorial judges and their role in democracies to uphold the rule of law.

At the meetings of the new Executive Committee and Board of Governors, I was thrilled to witness energetic participation and eagerness of all members—new and old. This was amply evident in the lively debates on ways to increase membership and to strengthen AJA in fulfilling its mandate. This renewed momentum augurs well for the future growth and sustainability of AJA.

Currently, we are exploring innovative ways to deliver our message and educate our members in our rapidly changing electronic age by such means as the enhancement of our webpage and its links, as well as the development of an AJA app that would put AJA in the forefront of judicial education.

To continue and strengthen AJA, we need to attract new members and retain existing ones to become an even stronger Voice of the Judiciary®. We need the help of all of you reading this column and your colleagues to assist in the recruitment of newly elected or appointed judges in your jurisdiction. Our commitment is reinforced by the continuation of our very successful program of offering a one-year free membership to newly elected or appointed judges and the use of a gift membership from the Executive Committee and the Board of Governors members to bring back former members.

I am eager to toil hard and long on behalf of the American Judges Association in Canada and the United States to discharge our goals and objectives throughout the coming year. I ask you to join me in this laudable adventure.

