



Federal Judges Association

The Bench Press

The Federal Judges Association Newsletter

March 2024

Dear Federal Judges Association (FJA) Members:

March marks the beginning of Spring, which means warmer weather is near! This month, we celebrate the accomplishments of trailblazing women throughout history. As Judges, it is crucial to acknowledge the courageous women of firsts who paved the way towards gender equality on the bench: Judge Genevieve Rose Cline, the first woman to serve as a federal judge, and Judge Florence Allen, the first woman to serve on an Article III appellate court.^[1] We especially recognize Justice Sandra Day O'Connor (1930-2023) who was a trailblazer in the legal field and made history as the first woman to serve on the Supreme Court of the United States. This Women's History Month, may we remember these prodigious women and the countless others who broke barriers to ensure that the judiciary would be more representative of the population it serves.



FJA President, J. Michelle Childs,
United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit

[1] <https://www.uscourts.gov/news/2015/02/26/women-way-pavers-federal-judiciary>



CELEBRATING
**WOMEN'S
HISTORY
MONTH**

New Member Highlight

The FJA Spotlights the Honorable DeAndrea Gist Benjamin



The FJA Celebrates the Appointment of Judge DeAndrea Gist Benjamin to the United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit. Upon confirmation, Judge Benjamin became the second woman of color, as well as the first person of color from South Carolina, to serve on the Fourth Circuit.

Judge Benjamin has strong ties to South Carolina as she has been a resident of Columbia, South Carolina her entire life. She attended Winthrop University, where she graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree and received the Order of the Omega. Judge Benjamin then went on to earn her Juris Doctor from the University of South Carolina.

Judge Benjamin started her legal career serving as a law clerk to the Honorable L. Casey Manning of the Fifth Judicial Circuit in South Carolina. After her clerkship she worked as an Assistant Solicitor for the Fifth Judicial Circuit Solicitor's Office's Juvenile and Family Division. Following her time at the Juvenile and Family Court Division, she became an Assistant Attorney General, often prosecuting cases that dealt with crimes against women and children. She then joined Gist Law Firm, where she was a partner and worked on employment, family, and personal injury matters at both the federal and state levels.

In 2004, Judge Benjamin joined the City of Columbia's Municipal Court. There she ruled on misdemeanor cases while also serving on both the Quality of Life Court and the Specialized Criminal Domestic Violence Court. In 2011, the South Carolina General Assembly appointed Judge Benjamin to serve on South Carolina's Fifth Judicial Circuit. While at the Fifth Judicial Circuit, she served as Chief Administrative Judge and Presiding Judge of the State Grand Jury. She would also fill in on the South Carolina Supreme Court.

Upon Judge Benjamin's confirmation to the bench, South Carolina Congressman Jim Clyburn said: "A proud product of South Carolina public schools and universities, Judge Benjamin is an experienced jurist with a wealth of knowledge and varied life experiences necessary to serve with distinction."

Judge Richard Gergel has expressed that "Judge DeAndrea Gist Benjamin came to the federal appellate bench with experience as a former prosecutor, assistant attorney general, attorney in private practice, municipal judge, and state trial judge. She was widely admired while on the state trial bench for her firm but fair management of her courtroom and respectful treatment of counsel and parties. She and her husband, Steve Benjamin, the former mayor of Columbia, have two daughters."

On the occasion of her investiture ceremony, held November 1, 2023, Chief Justice Donald W. Beatty of the South Carolina Supreme Court remarked, "as chief justice, I had the opportunity to see her development as a jurist She displayed exemplary judicial temperament and a strong command of the law. Her work ethic is unassailable."

We welcome Judge Benjamin to the federal judiciary and the FJA.

Committee Updates

Our committees are working for you! Here are some highlights of their accomplishments.

International Rule of Law

Chair: Cynthia M. Rufe



The FJA has partnered with the National Judicial College and IALGBTQ+ Judges to join them for the Judicial Renaissance IV Conference in Lisbon, Portugal on September 9 – 12, 2024. Please click button below to download the flyer or click here to learn more and/or register: <https://www.judges.org/courses/judicial-renaissance-4/>.

This is a great opportunity to expand your legal expertise and embark on a quest to broaden your horizons and deepen your understanding of the human condition. A highlight of the conference will be spending a day, including lunch, at the Constitutional Law Court!

We would love to have a contingent of FJA members attend if possible. Please let us know if you decide to go so we can give a report to our members on our attendees.

Judicial Renaissance Flyer

Civics & Service

Chair: Robin S. Rosenbaum

2024 is off to a great start for Civics & Service!

The Naturalization Civics Challenge—a program where high-school students who score at least a 90% on the U.S. citizenship test earn a certificate and an invitation to a local naturalization ceremony—continues with May 1 as the next deadline for participation. Information on how students can participate is available on the FJA website. If you have contacts at any high schools, we'd be grateful if you passed the link along to them: <https://www.federaljudgesassoc.org/federal-judges-association-civics-challenge/>



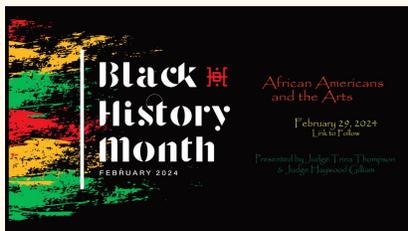
Our Clerkship Chat programs, which are panels on clerking that we hold at law schools that traditionally do not send many students to federal clerkships, held its first program of the new year. On February 29, at the University of Wyoming College of Law, Judge Veronica Rossman, Tenth Circuit, moderated a panel on which Circuit Judge Gregory A. Phillips, Tenth Circuit, District Judge Julie A. Robinson, District of Kansas, and District Judge Margaret Strickland, District of New Mexico, participated. By all accounts, the panel was well-received by the law students. We really appreciate the efforts of all the judges involved in making this panel such a success. This month, we look forward to holding another Clerkship Chat program at Florida International University. We are also considering expanding the program to provide law schools that don't get many visitors who are federal judges, often because of their locations, with panels on federal subjects of interest to law students, such as off-the-beaten-path law schools, that do not get visited often by federal judges. We hope to host panels to discuss such topics as pathways to the bench, what it's like to be a federal judge, and pointers for federal practice. If you have any interest in participating in such a panel, please let us know.

And finally, we continue to gratefully accept submissions for the FJA's Speech Bank, which members can use as a starting place when they need to give speeches. The Speech Bank has speeches covering a variety of topics.

[Share the Civics Challenge Flyer](#)

Education

Co-Chairs: Leo M. Gordon and Pamela Pepper



The Education Committee tried something new in February. With the theme for this year's Black History Month being "African Americans and the Arts," the committee convinced two of our talented, artistic colleagues to share their passions with us in a videotaped presentation that FJA members could watch at their leisure. Judges Haywood Gilliam and Trina Thompson of the Northern District of California were the featured artists. Judge Gilliam is a jazz fan who plays the tenor saxophone in a band. He gave an outstanding presentation of the history of jazz in six songs, with pauses built in to allow viewers to take a break and listen to each song after he discussed its significance. Judge Thompson is both a photographer and a water colorist. She shared the work of some of her favorite photographers and some of her own art. On February 29, 2024, each FJA member received an email with links to the recording and to the handouts Judges Gilliam and Thompson provided. A huge thanks to Judges Gilliam and Thompson for a

delightful, informative, inspiring conversation!

Stay tuned for information about future Education Committee programs. We have lots of ideas in the hopper, including a Thirst for Knowledge Thursday presentation on cybercrime, more heritage month presentations and a presentation on the U.S. Marshals Service Home Intrusion Detection Systems (HIDS) program.

[View February Webinar](#)

Ethics

Chair: Albert Diaz

It's been a busy month in the federal judiciary on the ethics front, and we are pleased to highlight valuable guidance and tools to ensure we all meet our ethical obligations.

First, please remember that judges are obligated to promptly report attendance at privately funded seminars. The AO recently distributed a memorandum detailing this reporting requirement.



Second, the Committee on Judicial Conduct and Disability recently published a Digest of Authorities on the Judicial Conduct and Disability Act. An informative memorandum from Committee Chair, Judge William Traxler, explains the Digest contents and how to access it. This is a valuable resource for all judges and senior staff in understanding the mechanics of the Act, but it's especially relevant for Chief Circuit Judges, circuit judicial council members, and circuit staff tasked with implementing the Act.

Third, the Committee on Codes of Conduct recently revised Advisory Opinion No. 57, regarding recusal issues arising out of parent-subsidiary relationships between companies. We commend this new and important guidance to you.

Finally, the Committee on Codes of Conduct has published a new conflict checklist designed specifically for law clerks and revised three other conflicts checklists. The checklists along with the Committee's transmittal memorandum explaining how a judge and his staff should utilize them are valuable tools as we uphold the highest values of the Judiciary.

Please click button below to download all documents referenced in this update. If you have any questions about any of these important updates and resources, please contact any member of the FJA Ethics Committee.

[Download Ethics Documents](#)

Membership

Chair: Nannette Jolivette Brown



The Membership Committee welcomes the following new members to the FJA:

Ana Isabel de Alba (9th Cir.)
Richard E.N. Federico (10th Cir.)
Anthony Devos Johnstone (9th Cir.)
John A. Kazen (S.D. Tex.)
Gretchen S. Lund (N.D. Ind.)

The following judges have been confirmed since our February newsletter. Please join us in welcoming them to the judiciary and encourage their membership in the FJA!

Monica Ramirez Almadani (C.D. Cal.)
Amy M. Baggio (D. Or.)*
Jacqueline Becerra (S.D. Fla.)*
Cristal C. Briscoe (N.D. Ind.)
Melissa Damian (S.D. Fla.)*
Joshua Paul Kolar (7th Cir.)
Joseph A. Laroski, Jr. (Ct. Int'l Trade)
David Seymour Leibowitz (S.D. Fla.)*
Karoline Mehalchick (M.D. Pa.)
Kirk Edward Sherriff (E.D. Cal.)
Micah W.J. Smith (D. Haw.)
Julie Simone Sneed (M.D. Fla.)*
Lisa W. Wang (Ct. Int'l Trade)

If you know any of these new judges, please reach out and encourage them to become a member of the FJA.

**Denotes judges who have not yet been sworn in according to the information we have been provided.*

In Memoriam

We mourn the loss of **Robert Leon Jordan**, U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Tennessee and **Gary L. Sharpe**, U.S. District Court for the Northern District of New York.

Quadrennial

Co-Chairs: Cathy Bissoon and Sara Darrow

The Quadrennial Planning Committee will hold its next planning meeting on March 19, 2024 at 12:30 PM ET. The next Quadrennial is to be held **April 27-29, 2026**. The committee plans to build upon the amazing success of past Quads and welcomes any input from members. Please feel free to contact co-chairs Cathy Bissoon and Sara Darrow with your ideas!

Senior and Retired Judges

Co-Chairs: Larry Piersol and James G. Carr

The Senior Judge Staffing Subcommittee of the Judicial Resources Committee did not meet in February. Instead, the Subcommittee has been gathering Circuit data. The Subcommittee expects to meet in late March.



Members in the News

Federal Judges Bring Civil Discourse Program to Law Students

Judge Robin Rosenberg, U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Florida, is a tireless advocate of civics education. Recently, Judge Rosenberg introduced the Judiciary's Civil Discourse and Difficult Decisions program to the first-year class at Duke Law School. Along with other federal judges and attorneys, Judge Rosenberg brought the groundbreaking program to law students as she presided over the three-hour interactive session geared towards civility and professionalism.



[Read More](#)

Upcoming Events



FJA Board Meeting

WHEN: April 17 - 19, 2024

WHERE: The Hyatt Centric Chicago Magnificent Mile

There will be an opportunity for FJA members to attend portions of the board meeting virtually by Zoom on **Friday, April 19, 2024**. If you are interested in attending by Zoom, please click [HERE](#) to register.

Judicial Renaissance IV

The College's annual Judicial Renaissance program, in collaboration with the Centro de Estudos Judiciários, and in partnership with the Federal Judges Association and ILGBTQ+ Judges, will be held in the historic and culturally rich city of Lisbon, Portugal.

Judicial Renaissance is an innovative and transformative experience for the judiciary. It is an intellectual retreat that transcends the boundaries of conventional legal education, immersing judges in the deep and diverse currents from which the law itself has emerged. Here, participants will traverse the vast landscapes of history, philosophy, the arts, humanities, and sciences, uncovering the rich tapestry that informs the very essence of jurisprudence.

This is more than just a study program—it is an intellectual odyssey that rekindles the ageless pursuit of wisdom and justice. It is a crucible where legal minds come to learn from the past and grasp the big ideas shaping our future. With guidance from a cadre of luminaries across varied disciplines, judges will explore enduring human achievements and the foundational principles of justice.

For more information, contact the Registrar's Office at (773) 784-6747 or email: registrar@judges.org.

Tuition: \$2,850
Register at: judges.org/jr4

Registration fee includes tuition, fees, cultural activity (including a dinner), and some meals. Registration does not include airfare, lodging or dinner. Spousal/partner/dependents are welcome to participate in activities for an additional fee.

This course may be eligible C.J.E. credit hours. Due to the international nature of this course, and collaboration with other international schools of judicial training, N.J.C. cannot predict the number of C.J.E. credits that will be approved by your state.

In partnership with:
FJA
Federal Judges Association
ILGBTQ+ Judges

www.judges.org

Judicial Renaissance, National Judicial Conference

WHEN: September 9-12, 2024

WHERE: Portuguese Center for Judicial Studies

The FJA has partnered with the National Judicial College to join them for a seminar and conference in Portugal.

During Judicial Renaissance, judges rediscover the foundations of justice as embodied within the scope of lasting human achievements.

**Registration is limited.
Sign-Up Soon!**

[Learn More](#)

April Edition | *The Bench Press*

Have a submission for the upcoming edition of *The Bench Press*? Please share it by **April 4, 2024**. We would love to share your special news with the membership. **Email us!**

[Email Us Your News](#)



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