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Families in Court: A National Symposium-- Opening Remarks

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Families in Court: A National Symposium

OPENING REMARKS

Honorable John F. Daffron, Jr.

On behalf of the State Justice Institute, let me welcome all of you to the Symposium. As many of you know, the Institute is a nonprofit organization established by Congress to improve the administration of justice in the state courts. It seeks to do this by giving away money, by awarding grants: grants to state and local courts; grants to national organizations, such as the organizations that are sponsoring this conference; grants to individuals, to universities, nonprofit corporations and to all those who would seek the improvement of court-related matters.

This particular Symposium evolved from concept papers that were submitted to SJI by each of the sponsoring organizations. These papers seemed individually to address specific concerns, problems that would occur in family matters in coordination of a number of cases involving a single family. Perhaps when the SJI considered the approval of this funding, they may well have paraphrased Mark Twain and said, "Everybody talks about family court improvement, but these organizations really do something about it." Now, given the critical importance of finding better ways to resolve these cases (cases that many times are multiple cases involving a single family and the interconnected issues), how appropriate it is to have the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, the Judicial College, the National Center and the ABA collaborate to develop a national conference here at Reno that seeks to define these pertinent issues more clearly, to identify existing approaches for resolving these

issues, and, hopefully, to set an agenda for future projects and programs.

All of you know of the sometimes, I emphasize *sometimes*, dis-sension, and perhaps the interorganizational communication and cooperation problems that occur from time to time. Sometimes it's difficult, sometimes it's frustrating. But on behalf of the SJI Board, I would like to thank The National Judicial College and the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges and the National Center for State Courts and, of course, the American Bar Association on their willingness to work together on this project and really to commend them and the excellent project planning committee and staff for their considerable efforts that have brought us together for the promise of a most provocative and informative program.

You know, we talk about improvements and we talk about coordination between the courts and sometimes between the judges of a single court. We need to do that, and this will be a focus of the conference. But I would hope that you find a way to think daringly, if you will, innovatively. Will the judicial system as we know it today be adequate to meet family needs in the 21st century? Are there matters involved with juveniles and families that ought to be removed from the adversary system? Do you need a judge in the court? Do you need just one judge in the court? There are some issues that could be quite provocative and, perhaps in a modest way on the side, they may stir greater insights.

When I think about things like that, and when I think about the Symposium and the exciting possibilities, the image that comes to mind is the metaphor of a planning conference like this at the turn of the 19th century on lighting. People get together—thoughtful people, scholars—to try to improve lighting, interior lighting. And you know what they talk about? They talk about boats and harpoons, because they're talking about rendering whale fat to provide the fuel for these lamps. And in a conference of that sort, surely you would find people talking about structure and about procedure and communication. And they talk about larger boats and sharper harpoons and better rendering practices. And wouldn't it be great if, in a conference of that sort, somebody over in the corner was pondering the effects of burning a carbon filament in an airless jar. Now, certainly you have to render the whales and keep the fuel going, but wouldn't the development of an incandescent lamp be a quantum leap forward in that lighting conference.

And I think about that, and I think about the possibilities that exist from this conference and I certainly hope that the suggestions

and the ideas that might evolve might be that new source of light, of signal light, as it were, for significant court improvements. When I think of the friendly competition at times of the components and sponsors of this program and I think about that source of new light, I really think about the lines from Emily Dickinson that are somewhat profound in their simplicity, and it goes something like this:

My candle is lit at both ends.

It will not last the night.

But ah, my foes, and oh, my friends,

It makes such a lovely light.

And I hope that will be our experience here.

