

**Address of Honorable John Finley, President of the Arkansas District Judges
Council
to
Arkansas District Judges and Arkansas District and City Court Clerks
Awards Luncheon
April 25, 2008
The Peabody Hotel
Little Rock, Arkansas**

As president of the Arkansas District Judges Council, I would like to welcome each of you to our annual awards luncheon.

This Council and the Clerks' Association have been moving swiftly in a very positive direction for the past several years. Indeed, since the year 2000, one of the driving forces in our Council has been our work to implement Arkansas Constitution Amendment 80.

Former Presidents of the District Judges Council, members of our board, committees, and supporters and workers in various organizations and particularly those in the Arkansas Legislature, Arkansas Bar Association, Arkansas Judicial Council, Administrative Office of the Courts, and the Supreme Court, have labored together during the past several years laying the platform to establish the District Court as the true third tier of the Arkansas Judiciary. My service as your President was made so much easier because of the excellent previous leadership that has been provided for this Council and the Arkansas Judiciary.

During the past several years we have moved forward with improved communications with other legal and judicial organizations in the state by having representatives from our organization serve as liaison members on the Arkansas Bar Association Board of Governors, and our representatives have attended the Arkansas Judicial Council meetings. In return, we have extended invitations to representatives from the Arkansas Bar Association, and the Arkansas Judicial Council to attend our meetings. These joint meetings have made it possible to interact with the members of these other courts and organizations which has been beneficial to the improvement of the Judiciary.

This year has been particularly noteworthy with the inauguration of the pilot court judges program. There are now fifteen full time district judges in Arkansas, and our pilot court section chairman and new president of the council, Judge Mike Robinson, in his presentation this morning, briefed us on the recent developments concerning the pilot courts.

We appreciate our pilot court section chairman, and new council president, Judge Mike Robinson, together with our Executive Director, Kay Palmer, for their work in the process of gathering statistics from the new pilot courts, which was a proper measure to insure that the pilot courts will be successful. And we also thank A. O. C. for their work in planning educational sessions at all of our meetings on the ethical and

legal considerations involved for the pilot judges, all of which should insure a successful transition for the pilot courts.

In our anticipation of becoming full time judges, we should not overlook the fact that the majority of the members of this organization are and will remain for some years to come, part-time District Judges. Every opportunity must be afforded to also address their particular court concerns. I would remind the members of the Council that we must remain an inclusive organization and that we must listen and be ready to represent all interests and points of view in the continuing process of becoming a full time judiciary.

The discussion in the morning session of the newly drafted proposed revision of the *Code of Judicial Conduct* reminds us of the importance of the positions we hold in the judiciary. Each of us is making a significant contribution in our own communities on a daily basis.

It has often been mentioned, but bears repeating, that the only contact a large percentage of our citizens have with the court system is in District Court.

It is likely that the public's impression of the justice system is formed at the desk or by a phone call to the court clerk who explains court procedure. Judges and clerks should all remember that our behavior is expected to be above reproach in our daily contact with the public as well as in private.

And we all recognize that as the people associated with the courts we have an enormous responsibility in educating the public, while at the same time maintaining our constitutional ideals of justice and continued respect for the courts by the citizens.

Today, as we look back over the past year and are beginning a new year for the Council, I ask each of you to enter into a new commitment to service. For our work is service to our courts, communities, and fellow citizens. We must continue to provide continuing education for our members and allow for the exchange of ideas among all the membership of judges and clerks from all court levels and jurisdictions.

And we will continue to pursue goals that we recognize as court reform and in that process must have a willingness to analyze what is already successful, retain the best of the past, and improve upon it for the future. That is our obligation for our courts and will ensure a successful future for our Judiciary.

We are often reminded of Oliver Wendell Holmes' statement, "The great thing in this world is not so much where we stand, as in what direction we are moving. We must sail sometimes with the wind and not drift, nor lie at anchor."

Just as we have moved forward in the past years with great progress, we believe the new year will evidence further progress and under our new leadership this council will be fully responsive to the changes and challenges that lie ahead.

At this time, It gives me great pleasure to introduce the new officers and board of the Arkansas District Judges council for the 2008-2009 year:

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| President | Hon. Mike Robinson Benton |
| Vice President | Hon. Mike Irwin Heber Springs |
| Secretary-Treasurer | Hon. Kim Bridgforth Pine Bluff |
| First District Representative | Hon. Dan Stidham Paragould |
| Second District Representative | Hon. Milas "Butch" Hale Sherwood |
| Third District Representative | Hon. Don Bourne Russellville |
| Fourth District Representative | Hon. Francis "Lucky" Crumpler Magnolia |

I would like to recognize Judge **Rusty Porter** of Helena-West Helena who has continued during the past year as immediate Past President to be a part of the all conference calls and meetings and served as Chairman of the Website committee

I would like to recognize Guests and Representatives from the Judicial Council: The Hon. **Dan Kemp**, Circuit Judge from Mountain View and a former District court Judge, The Hon. **Kirk Johnson**, Circuit Judge from Texarkana and a former District Judge, and The Hon. **Vann Smith**, of Little Rock.

I want to especially thank: **Marty Sullivan** at AOC for his work in arranging these meetings and making sure that everything goes smoothly, and **Irene Cross**, for all the work she does in organizing the meetings and all those at AOC for their work in making these conferences successful. We also recognize **Keith Caviness**, who has for many years served with distinction at AOC and offered wise counsel and direction to the Arkansas Judges.

Finally what could this council do without the very capable, efficient and wonderful leadership of our Executive Director, **KAY PALMER**? We appreciate and thank Kay for all of her work and service to the District Judges Council.

I want to thank all of you who have helped this organization and me during the past year and for your best wishes. My reception in the service as your president has been positive and it is with great appreciation for the workings of this Council that I conclude my year. It has been an honor and privilege to serve as ADJC President.

Judge John C. Finley, III
Ashdown