

2016 CCJ/COSCA CONFERENCE HELD IN JACKSON, WY

The 2016 Conference of Chief Justices and State Court Administrators (CCJ/COSCA) was held on July 23rd-July 27th in Jackson, Wyoming and was attended by 250 people: 46 Supreme Court Justices and 43 State Court Administrators, together with their families and guests. Chief Justice Burke commented that the conference “was a wonderful opportunity to build relationships with chief justices and court administrators, and to identify solutions to the challenges that face judicial branches throughout the country.” The National Center for State Courts, a non-profit court improvement organization, provides guidance and resources to plan the business and educational programs for the CCJ/COSCA conferences. The theme of this conference was “Domestic Relations: Courts as the Mechanism for Change.” The educational programs consisted of *Self-Represented Litigants in Family Court—Courts Balancing Strategies and Services for Accessing Justice* (strategies to assist SRLs, and courts’ concerns on judicial ethics and engagement); *Civil Justice Initiative* (review of 13 recommendations for improvements in the delivery of civil justice in state courts); *Integrated Domestic Violence Court—Reducing Burdens on Victims and Families* (benefits of the one family/one judge concept); *Third-Party Evaluators in Child Custody Proceedings: Who Are They and What Are the Standards of Practice?* (requirements for evaluator training and qualifications from state-to-state); and a Law and Literature Session featuring Wyoming author C. J. Box discussing the inspiration for his murder-mystery *Free Fire*.

Governor Matt Mead, in the conference’s opening address, expressed the importance of the judicial system and his appreciation for its work. He stressed the significance of having an independent judiciary. “As Alexander Hamilton said in *The Federalist Papers*, No. 78, ‘This independence of the judges is equally requisite to guard the Constitution and the rights of individuals.’ I believe that to my core. In this hyperpolitical world . . . we must fiercely, fiercely defend the judiciary.” The Governor explained there are times when the Wyoming Supreme Court has reached decisions unfavorable to the executive branch, “. . . but isn’t it exactly the point that they have their independence—isn’t it exactly the point of an independent judiciary that they can stand up and say, ‘While you may have appointed me, Governor, these facts and this law require a result that is contrary to your interest.’ We have to recognize the importance of that. . . . We have to love the system we have, and we have to protect it with everything we can, particularly during these times.”

For the farewell luncheon, Chief Justice Burke welcomed Senator Alan Simpson as the guest speaker. Senator Simpson entertained the audience with anecdotes about his family life and his political career. “We were proud to host this event and, from our perspective,” said Chief Justice Burke, “this conference could not have gone better. For many in attendance this was their first trip to Wyoming. We have no doubt that they will seek out additional opportunities to return to our great state. Many made it a point to express their appreciation for the warmth, authenticity and competence of our Supreme Court staff. We are very proud of the impression that they made on judicial leaders from around the country.”

Lily Sharpe, Wyoming State Court Administrator, commented that “Given the Wyoming Supreme Court’s limited resources, it was quite an endeavor to host this kind of event, but our staff—and several of their spouses—really pitched in and came through with flying colors. It was a wonderful event.”