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Robert J. Torres Jr.

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President's Column

Robert J. Torres, Jr.

Hafa adai (greetings) colleagues and *Court Review* readers!

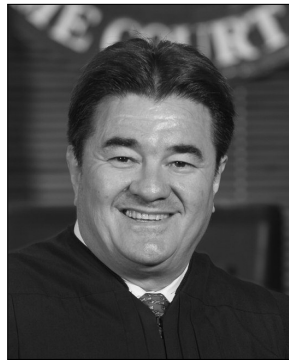
In this column, we celebrate Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, who was the first woman to serve on the United States Supreme Court after President Ronald Reagan nominated her in 1981. Often inhabiting the ideological center, O'Connor cast pivotal votes on controversial issues, was referred to in a 2001 *New York Times* article by Jeffrey Rosen "as the most powerful woman in America," and was awarded the highest civilian honor in the United States, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, by President Barack Obama in 2009. Sandra Day O'Connor, according to Chief Justice John Roberts, is "a towering figure in the history of the United States and indeed the world [and] is a role model not only for girls and women but for all those committed to equal justice under law."

Last fall, in a letter released by the Supreme Court's public information office, Justice O'Connor revealed that she was stepping away from the public life because she is at the beginning stages of dementia. Instead of simply disclosing her decision, she used the occasion to urge citizens to increase their commitment to civics education—a cause in which she strongly believes and has spent numerous years and unwavering energy to promote and sustain. In her letter, she explained how she saw firsthand the need for citizens to understand the Constitution and the nation's unique system of government because together, we can work within our communities to solve problems, learn from what has served us best over time, and work for the common good to hold our governmental institutions accountable.

Justice O'Connor founded iCivics, an online educational classroom that reimagines civics to cultivate a new generation of students for thoughtful and active citizenship. Aimed to expand the reach of civics education to every student in America by 2021, iCivics helps young people to "grow more informed, more curious, and more engaged in civic life." Justice O'Connor believes that "the practice of democracy is not passed down through the gene pool. It must be taught and learned anew by each generation of citizens." More information about iCivics can be found at <https://www.icivics.org/>.

Inspired by Justice O'Connor, more than a decade ago I ini-

tiated a program at the Judiciary of Guam centered around Law Day to promote a better understanding of law and civics. We engage students and the public through thought-provoking resources and learning experiences to broaden understanding of law and government. The program has been nationally recognized by the American Bar Association with the Law Day Outstanding Activity Award in 2008, 2009, 2012, 2015, 2016, and 2018. This program has seen enormous success in participation from the elementary school level all the way up to high school, and it continues to help students become effective citizens and leaders.



In line with Justice O'Connor's mission to create a nationwide civics education program, I urge each of you to make a commitment to civic learning and civic engagement. A mission of the American Judges Association is to "provide a forum for the continuing education of its members and the general public." As judicial officers, we can honor Justice O'Connor's lifelong mission to champion civics education within our own communities by creating and encouraging programs like iCivics. As Justice O'Connor aptly stated, "If we want our democracy to thrive, we must commit to educating our youth about civics and to helping young people understand their crucial role as informed, active citizens in their communities and in our nation." She challenges each of us to do something—do something in our communities to capture the interest of our youth and to help them learn about and appreciate civics and how our laws and government work. There are important lessons that we can learn as a community through increased civics education, and we can honor Justice O'Connor's vision by educating future generations of students to be active participants in their communities. Justice O'Connor believes that "civic knowledge is a prerequisite for civic participation," and with increased civic participation, our communities can be more informed, thrive for the good of all, and work toward a better world for this and future generations.

Among all her accomplishments, Justice O'Connor considered engaging the next generations of citizens to be her most important work and her legacy. Let us honor her by inspiring kids to want to stay involved in making a difference.