

Rule of Law Conference is May 14

May 6, 2008

The Mississippi Supreme Court on May 14 will host a multi-disciplinary conference to discuss the importance of the rule of law at all levels of society.

The Rule of Law Conference will bring together representatives of business, religion, education, the media, medicine, non-profit organizations, the legal profession and the judiciary.

The program will be streamed live via the Internet on the Supreme Court's web site, www.mssc.state.ms.us, from 9:15 a.m. to 1 p.m. May 14.

The Rule of Law Conference will be hosted by the Supreme Court, working with the American Bar Association's World Justice Project, The Mississippi Bar and business, education and religious leaders.

Supreme Court Chief Justice James W. Smith Jr. said, "This multi-disciplinary conference will bring together leaders from a broad range of disciplines, including business, education, the judiciary, religious, medical, non-profits and the media. The conference will examine how and why the rule of law underpins the work all of us do and create the basis for working together in the future. We will stress the importance of adherence to the rule of law by all citizens, especially during these critical times within our beloved profession."

Conference Co-chair and ABA Board of Governors member W. Scott Welch III of Jackson said, "A primary objective of the conference is to allow participants to explore how the rule of law touches every aspect of our lives, and to permit the judiciary and the lawyers attending to hear the concerns and thoughts of Mississippians from other walks of life."

W.C. "Cham" Trotter III of Belzoni, The Mississippi Bar's delegate to the American Bar Association, said, "We hope the various perspectives to be presented will afford a unique opportunity to explore the ways in which decisions made in the justice system affect other sections of society. We also hope that the upcoming conference will provide a better understanding of how the citizens of Mississippi together can improve the system of justice."

At 9:15 a.m., Gov. Haley Barbour and Chief Justice Smith will open the program with a welcome in the second floor En Banc Courtroom at the Gartin Justice Building.

Six breakout discussion sessions beginning at 9:45 a.m. will look at the importance of the rule of law from the perspectives of business, education, the media, the medical field, non-profit organizations and religion. A one-hour panel discussion will follow at 11:15 a.m. in the En Banc Courtroom.

Former Judge Charles Pickering of the Fifth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals will deliver a keynote address at 12:15 p.m. Former Hinds County Circuit Judge Robert Gibbs will close the program.

Chief Justice Smith said, "Many people do not make the connection between the rule of law and what matters most to them and their families – issues such as safety, jobs, health and education. In the United States, the rule of law is relatively strong, but comes up short in many ways. With the resources and knowledge we have today, why can't we do more to end violence, poverty, corruption, sickness and injustice?"

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Chief Justice Smith said, “We seek to advance the rule of law in Mississippi, in the United States and abroad. By learning from each other and acting on our common interest in strengthening the rule of law in our state and community, we can help assure a vibrant and progressive future for our institutions and citizens.”

Mississippi is the sixth state to host a Rule of Law conference as part of the World Justice Project.

American Bar Association President William H. Neukom began the World Justice Project (WJP), a multinational, multi-disciplinary initiative to strengthen the rule of law worldwide.

The WJP working definition of the rule of law includes four universal principles:

- The government and its officials and agents are accountable under the law;
- The laws are clear, publicized, stable and fair, and protect fundamental rights, including the security of persons and property;
- The process by which the laws are enacted, administered and enforced is accessible, fair and efficient;
- The laws are upheld, and access to justice is provided, by competent, independent, and ethical law enforcement officials, attorneys or representatives, and judges who are of sufficient number, have adequate resources, and reflect the makeup of the communities they serve.

Mississippi Public Broadcasting will videotape the conference. Portions of the video may be edited into a DVD to be offered as a classroom teaching tool.

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