

*Chief Justice Canady's State of the Judiciary Remarks  
Virtual 2020 Florida Bar Convention*

Thank you for the kind introduction, John. I'm very grateful for the opportunity to speak today in this general assembly of The Florida Bar.

John, all of the members of our profession owe you a debt of gratitude for the leadership you have demonstrated during your year as president—and especially during the current crisis.

On behalf of our Court, I want to thank you and executive director Josh Doyle for your tireless efforts to keep The Florida Bar moving forward during this crisis. We are deeply grateful for the outstanding leadership you have provided in adapting to the circumstances brought on by the pandemic.

During this time, Florida's judges have recognized that the work of our courts could not be brought to a grinding halt by the pandemic. We all understand that the protection of the liberty and the prosperity of our people depends on a healthy, functioning court system. And that the goal of equal justice for everyone—which would be meaningless without courts and lawyers—is at the very heart of our constitution and the promise of America.

Judges throughout Florida are working hard to carry on judicial business to the maximum extent possible given the constraints imposed by the pandemic. I'm grateful to the judges—county, circuit and district judges—who in the face of the pandemic continue to provide justice for the people of Florida.

In particular, I want to salute the chief judges throughout the state who have provided energetic leadership in adapting to the difficulties posed by the pandemic. The operational challenges have been manifold, and the chief judges have managed those challenges day in and day out to keep the wheels of justice moving. In the midst of the pandemic, the people of Florida have been well served by our chief judges.

It is also important to recognize the essential work of court staff. We as judges can't accomplish anything without the support of our excellent staff. Charting a course through the pandemic has required special effort by court staff at all levels. I especially want to thank Lisa Kiel, our state courts administrator, and her team for all the work they have done to address the problems brought on our court system by the pandemic. Lisa and her team have worked ceaselessly throughout the

pandemic. And they have done so cheerfully and with great professionalism. I would never be able to perform my duties as chief justice without their support.

Of course, our courts can't function without the participation of our justice system partners. The clerks, the counties, the sheriffs, the state attorneys, the public defenders, and all the lawyers who come before our courts—all these play an essential role in the work of justice. I'm very grateful for the work that everyone has done to move forward in the face of the pandemic. This has been a challenging time for all the participants in our system. I appreciate the commitment of all those participants to serving the people of our state through the current difficulties.

From very early in the pandemic, Florida's courts and lawyers began to pivot to the use of video and telephone conferences to deal with matters that could be addressed through those means. Judges and lawyers adapted to the changed environment with admirable speed. So a great deal of judicial work has been accomplished during this time. Cases have been moving forward.

And we have learned a great deal from this experience that will benefit the court system long after we are beyond the constraints imposed by the pandemic. I believe that in future years when we look back on this difficult time we will see that seeds were planted that helped our courts become more efficient and responsive.

Although much work has been done, we have been through an extended suspension of jury trials. And we are now intently focused on taking all steps possible to safely resume jury trials throughout the state. We all understand that many matters—both criminal and civil—cannot be resolved without a trial or the immediate prospect of a trial.

Jury trials indeed are central to our system of justice. That system will not be fully functional until jury trials are restored. We are moving deliberately—but not precipitously—toward that restoration. We are doing so in a way that is consistent with protecting the health of all trial participants and the public health. All the participants in the jury trial process—many of whom are compelled to be there—must have confidence that we understand the critical importance of protecting their health. Meeting that condition is essential if the resumption of jury trials will be successful.

As a part of the incremental restoration of jury trials, we will be conducting pilot projects in several of our judicial circuits for civil jury trials that are conducted at

least in part remotely. And of course, we recognize that—because of the important interests at stake—a priority must be placed on resuming jury trials for criminal cases.

As we have lived through the pandemic over the last three months, we have learned much about the novel coronavirus. But perhaps the most important thing we have learned is how much we have left to learn. The more we learn about the virus, the more reason we have to be humble about the limits of our knowledge. That uncertainty cannot be allowed to immobilize us, but it does require that we proceed thoughtfully, deliberately, always willing to reexamine our preconceptions, and with an awareness that everything we are doing in response to the pandemic is a work in progress.

As we have been moving through this uncertain terrain, I am very grateful for the contribution made by the Workgroup on the Continuity of Court Operations under the outstanding leadership of Judge Lisa Munyon. The workgroup is comprised of an extraordinary group of people who have made an extraordinary contribution to the efforts of the judicial branch to meet the challenges posed by the pandemic. They have put aside their other obligations and have devoted untold hours to the issues dealt with by the workgroup. I am so grateful to them for everything they have done to help us chart the course forward for our branch.

During recent conversations with legislative leaders throughout the state, I have been greatly encouraged by the expressions of support for the important work of the judicial branch. As our courts go forward and deal with the pandemic backlog and pandemic-generated cases, the support of the legal profession for adequate funding for the judicial branch will be more important than ever. There are certainly great challenges ahead of us, but I'm confident that we will be able to meet those challenges.

Finally, I want to express congratulations and best wishes to Dori Foster-Morales and Mike Tanner as they take on their new responsibilities for leadership of The Florida Bar. I know that Dori and Mike will do an outstanding job for the lawyers of Florida. And I am very much looking forward to working with them over the next 12 months. I am grateful for their friendship, and I admire their commitment to serve the Bar and the people of our state.

As chief justice, I now say to all the lawyers and judges in Florida—and to all those who help us in our work—thank you for giving life to the rule of law and for pursuing the goal of equal justice for all. Stay safe!