

Daily Journal

www.dailyjournal.com

TUESDAY, APRIL 25, 2017

CA Chief Justice explains letter to Sessions

Cantil-Sakaue 'called out' ICE arrests at courts

By Eli Wolfe
Daily Journal Staff Writer

LOS ANGELES — California's chief justice made a passionate appeal for attorneys to take greater action on behalf of people in the country illegally and explained her reasons for writing an open letter to U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions at an award ceremony held by the Arab American Lawyers Association of Southern California.

Chief Justice Tani Gorre Cantil-Sakaue's keynote interview kicked off the association's annual banquet on Friday night, which featured presentation of the organization's lifetime achievement award to Los Angeles County Superior Court Judge James Kadao and the bestowing of the Judge James Kadao Award to attorney Victor L. George.

Cantil-Sakaue described her motivation to write an open letter last month to Sessions and Department of Homeland Security Secretary John Kelly expressing concern over reports U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials were "stalking undocumented immigrants in our courthouses to make arrests."

"I thought, 'Why isn't Chief Justice so-and-so from this state saying anything about this?'" Cantil-Sakaue said, noting that it was a critical issue for the judiciary to address "because it is a separation of powers issue, it is a public trust and confidence issue, and I believe we have a right to speak about the court system as a chief justice."

"So you can see, it was anger. It was: Why isn't anyone speaking about this? It goes on, and no one calls it out. So I called it out," she added.

Cantil-Sakaue's letter, which she underscored with an op-ed in the Washington Post last week, produced a wave of legal actions in California on behalf of people who have entered the United States without permission, including Sen. Kamala Harris' support for the Protecting Sensitive Locations Act. If passed, it would restrict the ability of ICE to make immigration arrests at courthouses.

"It seemed to create a movement and a voice, which was important because I was greatly concerned that we were getting sporadic reports but no one was calling it out, and it had to be called out," Cantil-Sakaue said.

The chief justice also praised individual bar associations for their work and encouraged the audience to participate in outreach efforts to communities that are in need

of legal services but mistrustful of law enforcement agencies.

"They're not going to come to you. I can tell you, the Filipino community that I grew up in, they would never have the nerve to approach a lawyer's office, and they would never ever even try to talk to a judge," Cantil-Sakaue said. "It's incumbent on us to bring never have the nerve to approach a lawyer's office, and they would never ever even try to talk to a judge," Cantil-Sakaue said. "It's incumbent on us to bring justice to them," she said.

Another factor that weighed heavily in Cantil-Sakaue's decision to write a letter: the 75th anniversary of the executive order given by Franklin Delano Roosevelt to detain more than 120,000 Japanese citizens and Japanese-Americans in internment camps in West Coast states during World War II. "To be honest, I had just come off of the 75th anniversary of the executive order that imprisoned 125,000 Japanese-Americans, without due process, for four years and threw away the key," she said. "So coming off of that and hearing about it, and then also with the Pasadena arrest on the courthouse steps, just put me over the top."

Noting that her in-laws were subjected to these camps, Cantil-Sakaue said this chapter in American

history, and the movement for reparations that followed it, had a powerful influence on her view of the importance of legal advocacy.

"It gave birth to a whole new group of advocates, lawyers, and law students, and I was one of them," she said. "We see it coming from a long way off now and lawyers stand up and say something about it, instead of 75 years ago when people didn't say anything."

Cantil-Sakaue, who rose from the Superior Court of Sacramento County to become Chief Justice of California in just 20 years, also had advice for female attorneys who face different treatment in the male-dominated legal world.

"If you want a long career in the law and you don't want to be ancient when you're 50, then you're going to develop a sense of humor," she explained. The justice added that personal champions can come from unlikely places, citing as an example retired California Chief Justice Ronald George, who she called a great advocate of diversity and gender equality. She quipped that former California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger appointed her to the court of appeal because he saw her name and "ethnic to ethnic, we identified."

eli_wolfe@dailyjournal.com