CANMORE

I am honored to be in Canmore and to play a small role in the Canadian Labour Arbitrators Conference. I come here from the United States at a very fraught time in the U.S.-Canada relationship. The current administration in Washington, DC has not treated Canada and its citizens with the respect and friendship they deserve. The current administration has mistreated many long-time U.S. allies but has inexplicably saved some of its harshest vitriol for its closest friend and neighbor. I could not even begin to explain why the U.S. administration is targeting a nation that has aided the U.S. and sacrificed lives during major crises, military conflicts, and natural disasters. I can only hold out hope that the fractured relationship can soon be repaired and sanity can be restored to U.S. politics.

Fortunately, I am not here representing the United States. I appear in my role as President of the National Academy of Arbitrators. The NAA is not a United States organization. At the moment, it is a North American organization comprised of the preeminent labor and employment arbitrators in the U.S. and Canada. Our numbers are small, about 350 active members, but our influence in the labor-management community is vast.

Since soon after the Academy's founding, Canadian arbitrators have been integral to the success of the NAA. In 1955, 8 years after the Academy was formed, Jacob (Jake) Finkelman and H.D. (Bus) Woods became the first Canadian arbitrators admitted to the NAA. According to Ken Swan's account in the Academy's 75th Anniversary publication, *A Quarter Century of New Directions in Leadership and Mission,* Woods "was a formidable presence in Canadian Industrial Relations, formerly the Director of the Center for Industrial Relations at McGill University and later Dean of Arts and Sciences at the same institution."

Woods became the first Canadian President of the Academy in 1976. The Canadian influence grew from there. If measured by Presidents, the Academy is rich in its Canadian presence. Ted Weatherill, Michel Picher, Allen Ponak, and Susan Stewart have all led the Academy with brilliance and foresight. I came into the Academy as Michel Picher ascended to the Presidency. My second Annual Meeting was in Ottawa, and it remains one of the best Annual Meetings I ever attended.

Canadian participation in the Academy extends beyond the Presidency. As of today, there are 43 Canadian arbitrators in the Academy, yet they demonstrate outsized influence on Academy governance and policy. Current

Academy Vice President and Executive Committee Member Jules Bloch follows in the footsteps of Randi Abramsky, Chris Albertyn, and Bill Marcotte, all of whom have served as VPs. Many more have served as Governors, including Richard McLaren, David Williamson, Margo Newman, Jim Oakley, Ken Swan, Steve Raymond, and current Governors Jasbir Parmar and Mark Asbell. Almost all Canadian members have served in important roles on committees that have greatly contributed to the success and growth of the NAA.

The professional relationship between U.S. and Canadian arbitrators remains unbroken despite the failings of the current U.S. government. As a U.S. arbitrator, I value that professional relationship, but more importantly, I value the friendships that I have developed with my Canadian colleagues. As NAA President, I recognize the need to maintain and expand our mutual interest in furthering the arbitration profession and maintaining the integrity of the collective bargaining process. We have been working side by side since 1955 when Finkleman and Woods entered the Academy. I pray we continue you to do so for the next 70 years and beyond.

Earlier I stated that “at the moment” the Academy is a North American organization. I have to explain “at the

moment." In *Fifty Years In The World of Work*, published by the NAA in 1997 on its 50th anniversary, the author referenced Finkleman and Woods' admission to the Academy and noted, "Internationalizing the Academy's membership was a significant decision." The Academy's push for internationalization continues today.

Labor and employment arbitration is only a subset of the much broader world of workplace dispute resolution, both in the U.S. and Canada and around the globe. In April 2025, the NAA formed a Task Force on Membership of International Neutrals. The Task Force's mission was to determine whether the NAA should offer membership to workplace neutrals in the international community.

In a number of countries, neutrals resolve union-employer disputes much like we do, but the neutrals are often government employees or labor court judges. Other workplace neutrals resolve disputes under international trade agreements, like CUSMA. Neutrals also resolve disputes between brands, their suppliers and their workers. More and more, the end steps in these dispute resolution procedures are mediation and arbitration. The task force found that many of the current neutrals in international disputes come from a background in commercial and financial dispute resolution. It learned that the parties were

having difficulty identifying neutrals with the required skills to resolve workplace disputes. International workplace neutrals skilled in labor-management matters are must better suited to resolve workplace disputes, but they lack an organizational home for their profession.

In consultation with workplace neutrals, parties and organizations across the globe, the Task Force concluded that the NAA could best serve the international workplace dispute resolution community by assisting in the creation of an associated entity, the International Academy of Workplace Neutrals. Chris Albertyn and Jackie Drucker are leading that effort.

Much work remains to be done on the formation of this new professional organization. It will be modeled on the NAA, and the NAA would provide administrative and organizational support. It heralds a huge step forward for the Academy and for the global prospects of workplace dispute resolution. I believe it is the next step in the evolution of the NAA. I expect to be able to report much more on the formation of this new international organization at our Annual Meeting in Montreal, May 4-7.

And a quick word on our Annual Meeting in Montreal. The selection of Montreal as the meeting site was very

intentional. By hosting the meeting in this great country, it is my hope that our Canadian brothers and sisters know that we are one united Academy that appreciates and values our professional relationships and our close friendships. We also hope to admit quite a number of new Canadian members.

Thank you once again for having me here and letting me say a few words. Have a great conference. I look forward to seeing you in Montreal.