

NASABA annual meet calls for action on diversity issues

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

Atlanta, GA

THE North American South Asian Bar Association (NASABA), representing the interests of over several thousand South Asian attorneys, hosted its third annual convention here last week, with around 400 attendees from 22 different states in the US as well as participants from Canada and India. IndusBar of Georgia hosted the convention at the InterContinental Hotel on June 16 and 17, with support by from the CompuCredit Corporation.

Attendees took the theme, "Networking to Influence, Influencing the Network", as a call to action, and engaged each other and a slate of nearly 70 distinguished panelists over a wide variety of topics at the two-day convention. The topics presented in panels, keynote addresses and receptions included several issues relevant to the South Asian legal community, such as diversity, business development, the USA Patriot Act, racial profiling and pro bono work.

"Feedback from each panel's attendees was very high because we worked hard to have subjects that appealed to law students, attorneys, legal business executives, general counsels and judges," said convention co-chair Sonjui Kumar. Under-scoring the influence wielded by South Asian attorneys was keynote speaker Neal Katyal. The Georgetown University Law Center professor, who received NASABA's Outstanding Advocacy Award, is lead counsel for detainees at the US detention camp at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. In *Hamdan v. Rumsfeld*, which Katyal argued before the US Supreme Court this March, Hamdan is challenging the constitutionality of military tribunals established by the US to try him. Katyal follows his own dictum that "our duty as lawyers is to make the world a better place".

Showing South Asians' impact in another way was luncheon keynote speaker Madhu Khatri, General Counsel of Wipro Technologies, the India-based information technology services giant. Khatri, whose company employs over 50,000, came from Bangalore to share her insights on the current state and future of business in South Asia and the possibilities available to American lawyers of South Asian descent.

The opening keynote was given by Judge Stanley Birch, of the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals, who is well known for his decision in the Schiavo case. Birch stressed the need for judicial independence. Other speakers included general counsels Teri McClure of UPS, Joaquin Carbonell of Cingular, and Javade Chaudhri of Sempra Energy.

NASABA started with 12 chapters in the fall of 2003. Less than three years later, it has 23 chapters. This enormous growth fuels the belief of Inderpreet Sawhney, NASABA Executive Committee member and Vice-President of the 2007 convention that next year's convention in San Francisco will draw over 500 attendees. NASABA is currently accepting speaker and panel ideas for 2007. Interested speakers can e-mail inderpreet@chugh.com.