

NYIAC Puts Ex-Sidley Arbitration Pro At The Helm

By **Caroline Simson**

Law360 (January 29, 2021, 11:31 AM EST) -- Despite the challenges thrown up in the last year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the New York International Arbitration Center's newly elected chair, Benno Kimmelman, says that he's excited about helping the center continue its mission of bringing the New York arbitration community together.

Kimmelman's election during the NYIAC's annual board meeting on Jan. 13 comes as the center announced this week that it had ended its sublease at the American Arbitration Association-International Centre for Dispute Resolution's facilities on 42nd Street and would be relocating to another facility. A time frame for the move has not yet been set, though the goal is to get as far along in the process as possible over the next year or so, Kimmelman told Law360.

The former co-leader of Sidley Austin LLP's global international arbitration practice, Kimmelman replaces arbitrator and mediator Edna Sussman, who had led NYIAC for the last two years. He told Law360 this week that he was pleased to be able to take the reins now, after the pandemic forced the New York arbitration community into their homes to conduct meetings and hearings virtually.

Despite the challenges of being unable to physically come together, he said that the center has really shown its value to the New York arbitration community over the last year by putting together more than 50 virtual programs. That's more than any other 12-month period since its founding in 2013, he said.

"This has been a tough year, and I think everyone suspects the next year is going to be as tough and maybe in some ways ever tougher, but ... during a really tough time, NYIAC has really stepped up and been extremely productive and valuable. It's a center in the true sense of the word," he said. "Programming during this tough time is both a sign of how valuable and productive an institution is, but it's also incredibly valuable to those who receive it. It's connected us, and it's made the community hang together very effectively at a time when people really needed that."

The goal of the center is to develop and promote New York as a center of arbitration, to promote New York law as a choice of law for contracts, and to promote New York City as a physical location in which to conduct arbitrations, and he said he's going to focus his efforts over the next year to continuing the work done in these areas by his predecessors.

He noted that over the last six years, NYIAC has really made its mark, becoming a focal point for the arbitration community in New York and beyond. In addition, the NYIAC over the last year broadened its constituent base by welcoming several economic consulting firms and third-party funders to the organization, adding their expertise and experience in international arbitration to the NYIAC community.

As for the new facilities, Kimmelman said that the center is currently working with an architect and a broker to find and design NYIAC's new home. He noted that NYIAC leadership is still in the process of evaluating the kind of space that will be appropriate "in a world that's obviously very different than it was in 2013, when we started."

Over the past 10 months the pandemic has made many in the arbitration community realize the value of virtual hearings, so among the priorities for the new space will be ensuring that it has adequate capabilities to accommodate virtual and hybrid in-person and virtual hearings, he said.

"We're in the process of evaluating location and types of space ... and looking at every alternative that's available in a New York real estate market that's different than it's ever been before," he added. "I think the pandemic has changed everyone's views about what you need to be effective in a world that's changed and may never be the same as it was before. We've got a lot of things to think about."

During the meeting in which Kimmelman was elected as NYIAC's new chair, the center's board of directors also appointed several new members for its executive committee and elected new directors.

The new executive committee members include Aldo Badini of Winston & Strawn LLP, Elliot Friedman of Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer LLP, Martin F. Gusy of K&L Gates LLP, and David Z. Pinsky of Covington & Burling LLP. The newly-elected directors include Tai-Heng Cheng of Sidley Austin LLP, Miriam K. Harwood of Squire Patton Boggs (US) LLP, Robert K. Kirshenber of Greenberg Traurig LLP, Kerri Ann Law of Kramer Levin Naftalis & Frankel LLP, and Ank Santens of White & Case LLP.

--Editing by Alyssa Miller.