

## **OAPCS Conference Keynote Speaker: Ember Reichgott Junge**



Former Minnesota Democratic State Senator Ember Reichgott Junge is the author of Minnesota's 1991 first-in-nation charter school law and a winner of the 2000 Innovations in American Government Award from Harvard University's JFK School of Government. The 18-year state legislator served as Senate Assistant Majority Leader before stepping down from public service in 2000.

Reichgott Junge wrote *Zero Chance of Passage: The Pioneering Charter School Story* in honor of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of chartering. The memoir of her experience in pioneering the first charter school law from an idea to a national movement has won multiple national awards. As a national educational policy

leader and spokesperson for charter schools, Reichgott Junge consults with charter school organizations around the nation and world, most recently meeting with charter advocates in Guam. She is past founding board member of the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (NACSA) and current board vice-chair of the Maryland-based Charter Schools Development Corporation (CSDC). She was inducted into the National Charter Schools Hall of Fame in 2008 and received the Brian Bennett Education Warrior Award from Democrats for Education Reform in 2012. She is currently board chair of Level Up Academy, a Minnesota charter school.

Being the keynote speaker at the 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Ohio Charter Schools Conference November 13, 2015, will provide an opportunity to motivate and inspire the state's dedicated charter stakeholders, according to Reichgott Junge. "I really appreciate the theme of the conference, coming of age, because chartering is still a young adult and we forget how young chartering is," she said.

"My theme is one of inspiration," she said, "that those involved in charter schools must not give up." The road to chartering is not easy, she noted, and her recent role in chairing the board to create a new charter school in Minnesota was a reminder of the challenges new schools present. "As chair of a start-up school myself I had no idea how hard it is to start a charter school," she said. "These efforts need to be rewarded and supported, it does not need to be this hard." The essential story of charters is that advocates can overcome obstacles and commit to the children, she added.

Reichgott Junge notes that most Americans are favorable about charters and school choice, with a 2014 *PDK/Gallup poll* showing 70 percent of Americans are positive in supporting the concept. The national growth and numbers of successful charter schools also point to the

continuing need for quality choices. “Here we are 25 years later from the first charter school law and look at the numbers,” she said. More than 3 million students attend over 6,700 charter schools in 43 states and the District of Columbia.

As President of Ember Communications, Reichgott Junge now carries her message forward through national speaking engagements. Her roles as a television political analyst, radio host and editorial writer have provided a unique perspective in how issues are relayed and perceived by the public, she noted.

“The charter school movement needs to return to its focus on innovation and how to restore innovation,” she said. “Chartering was viewed as a way to create new and different solutions. We need to go back to the roots of charters where parents and teachers could innovate and be held accountable for that flexibility,” she said.

Reichgott Junge will share more of her perspective on chartering during her keynote on Friday, November 13. For more information on her book, go to [www.zerochanceofpassage.com](http://www.zerochanceofpassage.com).