

CITIZENS' COMMITTEE FOR EVALUATION OF JUDGES

Background Information

The Citizens' Committee for Evaluation of Judges was formed in February, 1984 with support from Arapahoe Community College and the Colorado Judicial Institute. CJI is a non-profit, non-partisan citizen group whose purpose is to work for continued excellence in the Colorado courts. This committee was created to study ways to bring more meaningful information to the voters of Colorado prior to judicial retention elections in November, 1984. The Eighteenth (18) Judicial District, made up of Arapahoe, Douglas, Elbert, and Lincoln counties, was selected as a pilot project site because it is most representative of the state as a whole.

Citizens from each of the four counties were asked to sit on the Committee. The Committee is composed of thirteen citizens who are from all walks of life -- including one attorney and one former judge. No member of the Colorado Judicial Institute or Arapahoe Community College served on the Committee. Don Forst, a Denver architect who has served as chairman, explains that "when the Committee began its task, it was apparent that many of us had little knowledge of the selection process or responsibilities of judges. We have learned a great deal." He added, "Members of this citizens' committee do not pretend to be experts on the law. Our responsibility is to inform the voters by providing a citizen's perspective." Forst went on to explain, "A reasonable degree of excellence must be expected of judges. With the great volume of cases, it is logical and natural that errors in judgment will occur. However, this must be considered against a total record of judgment. This is what we have tried to do."

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PRESS RELEASE

The Citizens' Committee for Evaluation of Judges recently finished its seven-month investigation into the performance of the ten district and county judges up for retention in November, 1984 from the Eighteenth (18) Judicial District. The Eighteenth (18) Judicial District includes Arapahoe, Douglas, Elbert, and Lincoln counties. The Committee has met twice monthly since February to compile and evaluate information obtained from surveys of bar associations, court personnel, jurors, district attorney and public defender offices, Court of Appeals, personal interviews of the judges, and court watching. As a result, the Committee is making the following recommendations to the voting public concerning these judges. Eight (8) judges the Committee recommends for retention display the legal competency, fairness, industriousness, dedication, and job performance qualities that are essential qualifications for people holding their position on the bench. The Committee has "no opinion" on one judge and "no comment" on another judge.

The Committee cites the following specific reasons for its stand on each judge.

DISTRICT JUDGES:Chief Judge Robert F. Kelley: Recommended for Retention

An outstanding judge who is thoughtful, compassionate and highly capable is what this committee found in Judge Kelly. In all polls, as well as our interview he rated high. We learned of his deep appreciations and concern for a courtroom that must be an arena of fairness. Judge Kelly possesses that quiet strength that is quite fitting to his task. In addition he has filled the position of Chief Judge with distinction and created a cooperative atmosphere between the judges in the Eighteenth (18) Judicial District.

Judge George B. Lee: Recommended for Retention

Judge Lee has held this position since 1975, having prior experience as a District Attorney and a Municipal Judge in this District. Judge Lee, in the various polls, rates high for his equal treatment of all persons, physical capability and courtroom demeanor. He currently sits on the Community Corrections Committee and has also instituted his own survey of jurors in order to provide feedback as to the courtroom proceedings. The Committee perceived weakness in judicial temperament and compassion.

Judge Thomas C. Levi: Recommended for Retention

Judge Levi rated well in the "people skills" -- somewhat less well, but still above average in areas such as complex legal matters and docket efficiency. He is perceived as a fair and competent judge. He has shown an awareness in attempting to move cases along as quickly as possible to reduce time and inconvenience to the public. He has expressed particular concern that the public know more about the day-to-day court proceedings instead of only the sensational cases.

Judge Kenneth K. Stuart: Recommended for Retention

Judge Staurt is considered by this committee, as well as by his peers, to be an exceptionally fine judge -- very knowledgeable about the law, courteous, fair to all, and possessing excellent administrative abilities. A vocal minority of the public has questioned some of his decisions. This committee, however, concludes that Judge Stuart is an outstanding judge and all available data supports this position.

Judge Richard D. Turelli: Recommended for Retention

The Committee found Judge Turelli to be sensitive and responsive to public input. He is perceived as a responsible public servant who has a profound influence on the community. Various survey results rate him high in courtesy and compassion. He is credited with maintaining a good rapport with defense and prosecuting attorneys. Areas of concern are control of his docket and the balancing of outside community activities and caseload management.

COUNTY JUDGES:

Judge Alan R. Beckman: Recommended for Retention Arapahoe County

Judge Beckman is dedicated, articulate, and has a strong personality. He also has a reputation as being a "tough" judge which gives the impression of arrogance and insensitivity. This has a tendency to detract from the appearance of being fair and impartial. This deficiency does not overshadow the fact that he is competent and has a good sense of the judicial system and what it means to the community.

Judge Thomas J. Curry: Recommended for Retention Douglas County

Judge Curry ranked well in many areas including judicial temperament and courtesy. Data indicates that he is not always prompt or accessible. His strengths, however, far outweigh his weaknesses. He is one of the youngest judges this committee reviewed and shows promise of becoming an outstanding judge.

Judge Garnet M. Foster: No Comment for Retention Lincoln County

The Committee was unable to evaluate Judge Foster due to a lack of sufficient information. Therefore, the Committee has "no comment" to make regarding the retention of Judge Foster.

Judge Chris G. Rallis: Recommended for Retention Arapahoe County

Judge Rallis's strengths are identified as: good knowledge of the law and procedure, equal treatment of all parties, preparation, and promptness in rulings. His weaknesses were identified as: docket efficiency, physical capability and restraint from prejudging cases. Overall, Judge Rallis is perceived as doing a better than adequate job as a County Judge.

Judge Ralph C. Taylor: No Opinion for Retention Arapahoe County

Judge Taylor has served as an Arapahoe County Judge for seven years. His previous experience was a twenty-five (25) year law career, including several years as a municipal judge in Littleton. He ranked well in punctuality, compassion and judicial temperament. Available evidence indicates that he may be fixed in his viewpoints and not consistent in following legislative law. With respect to his application of the law and his responsibilities as a judge there is some concern. The Committee spent a great deal of time discussing Judge Taylor's perceived performance. The Committee could not reach a consensus. Therefore, the Committee has "no opinion" to make to the public on Judge Taylor's retention.