

Safeguarding Justice: Judicial Independence in a Changing World



Over the past couple of years, NAWJ's Judicial Independence Committee/Informed Voter Project has been updating our website and all of the materials posted there for members to use in educational programs around the country. These have been overhauled to reflect the changing nature of attacks on judicial independence globally as well as in the United States, so they can be used more effectively to address issues arising in the current environment. In the program we will explain and demonstrate the new materials, which include videos, animation, social media messages, PowerPoint slide decks, printable handouts, and more, so that NAWJ members and collaborators can message effectively about the importance of preserving an independent judiciary.

Learning Objectives:

1. Analyze how the changing geopolitical landscape affects judicial independence and the role of judges;
2. Explore the relationship between judge's free speech and judicial independence;
3. Identify concrete communication strategies for safeguarding judicial independence – every judge makes a difference!

Speakers:



Hon. Robin Hudson (Ret.)

Robin E. Hudson is a Georgia native, but has lived in North Carolina since her early teens. She served on the Supreme Court of North Carolina from January 2007 until her second term ended December 31, 2022. Previously, she served on the North Carolina Court of Appeals from January 2001 through December 2006. She is the first woman in North Carolina elected to either appellate court without having been appointed first.

Justice Hudson graduated from Page High School in Greensboro, then Yale University in 1973, as a member of the first class in which women entered Yale as freshman; she then went to the Law School at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill, graduating in 1976. She practiced law out of Raleigh and Durham until her election to the Court of Appeals. Her practice

concentrated on workers' compensation and civil and criminal litigation, and included numerous appeals.

Justice Hudson was a member of the steering committee that founded the North Carolina Association of Women Attorneys in 1978, and has been a member of the organization ever since. She served on the Family Court Advisory Committee from 2001 to 2022, and is currently a member of several other committees and organizations of lawyers and judges. She has been a member of the National Association of Women Judges since 2003; since 2015 she has served as national co-chair of its Judicial Independence Committee, which oversees the award-winning "Informed Voters Project (IVP)".

Justice Hudson has been the recipient of numerous awards, including the Order of the Long Leaf Pine, presented by the Governor and Attorney General of North Carolina on February 25, 2023, and the Outstanding Appellate Judge Award, presented by the North Carolina Advocates for Justice in June 2022. She was the recipient of the Champion for Children Award, in April 2023 by the NC Foundation for Public School Children.

Most recently, in December 2023, the National Judicial College honored Justice Hudson by naming her as one of its "60 Courageous Judges" in the United States, the only judge from North Carolina included.

She is married and has two grown children, two beautiful granddaughters, two handsome grandsons, and three English Shepherds.

Annette Pitts

Hon. Debra L. Stephens



Hon. Christine Walczyk

Judge Christine Walczyk has been a trial judge in Wake County, North Carolina for 18 years. Wake County includes the capital city of Raleigh and is the most populated county in the state. She is Lead Judge in general civil court, and was Lead Judge in family court from 2013 until 2021.

Judge Walczyk graduated *magna cum laude* from the Boston College Carroll School of Management in 1992. She completed her Juris Doctor at the University of North Carolina School of Law at Chapel Hill and went on to open her own law practice. For more than eleven years, Judge Walczyk was a managing partner at Grafstein & Walczyk, P.L.L.C. representing small businesses with their transactional and litigation needs. She also represented indigent defendants in criminal cases.

Judge Walczyk is passionate about promoting and supporting women in the legal profession, access to justice, and judicial independence. She currently serves on the Judicial Independence Committee of the National Association of Women Judges, the North Carolina Bar Association's Committee on Women in

the Profession, and the Wake County Legal Support Center Advisory Board. Judge Walczyk is also co-Chair of the Judicial Division of the North Carolina Association of Women Attorneys.