

15 January 2022

**JUDICIAL INDEPENDENCE COMMITTEE:**

**Informed Voters/Fair Judges Project**

**Co-Chairs: Justice Debra Stephens (Supreme Court of Washington) and Justice Robin Hudson (Supreme Court of North Carolina)**

**Description:**

Since 2011, when it became apparent that unlimited sums of money could be spent on attack ads aimed at judges in elections, members of NAWJ decided to respond proactively, and thus the Informed Voters/Fair Judges Project was created. Now usually called IVP, this project has been the primary work of the JI Committee from that time to the present. Among the first goals set by Judge Joan Irion, Justice Judith McConnell, and other early leaders of IVP, was to create educational materials for the public geared to a variety of age groups, to counter attacks on judges by providing accurate history and background information about the role of the Judicial Branch of our Constitutional democracy and the importance of independent and impartial courts to all of the people in America.

In 2013, IVP obtained a grant and created a video (“Free and Fair”) with narration and images of retired Justice Sandra Day O’Connor. The video won an Emmy for Best Public Service Announcement that year, and has been presented at many of the IVP programs and presentations over the ensuing years. By 2016, IVP had created and posted online an entire Tool Kit consisting of the video, a variety of PowerPoint slide decks and printable handouts with guidance (adaptable for any US state) on how to evaluate judges and candidates by criteria consistent

with their role. In addition, a Prentice Foundation funded animation on the importance of voting for state judges, has been added to the materials. These programs have been downloaded and presented by our members and collaborators many times all around the country, and deployed in states facing particular crises affecting their judges. All materials are currently being updated, and along with an overhaul of the IVP website, should be back online this year.

Just before the pandemic, IVP entered into major collaborations with two national organizations to broaden the scope and improve the materials in our presentations. In 2019 IVP entered an agreement with the American College of Trial Lawyers (ACTL), to send teams including one ACTL Fellow and one IVP Committee member to make presentations to the public in fifteen states as a pilot project; this pilot has been completed and we are currently exploring additional collaboration with ACTL.

At around the same time, IVP received a grant from the American Board of Trial Attorneys (ABOTA) Foundation, to update and produce a new version of the educational video, to use for IVP programs and juror orientation efforts in interested states. The video is now essentially completed and ready for release later this winter.

Also in 2020-21, IVP continued regular Zoom meetings, and has expanded to add three new subcommittees (Administrative and Immigration Judges; Literature Review and Clearinghouse; and Communications with NAWJ and other organizations), in addition to continuing our essential education work involving the entire committee. We look forward to continuing in 2022 to expand the scope and reach of IVP's work, which is as necessary now as ever. Our first IVP Webinar is scheduled for March 18, 2022, at noon.