

President's Column

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This special edition of *Court Review* will be devoted to the critical issue of judicial independence. The articles contained here were solicited as part of the National Forum on Judicial Independence, which will take place at the AJA's 44th annual educational conference in San Francisco. For those attending the conference, these papers will be an integral element of the Forum and will be discussed and debated in San Francisco by the authors and conference attendees. For those who can't attend the Forum, these articles present excellent analyses by respected judicial professionals about various aspects of the concept of judicial independence.

A bit of background about the Forum is worth reviewing. This program really had its origins at the AJA's Executive Committee meeting in January 2003. I wanted a program about judicial independence for a future AJA conference, preferably the one I would preside over in 2004. Judges Fran Halligan, Terry Elliott, Steve Leben, Gayle Nachtigal, Mike Cicconetti, Bonnie Sudderth, and Jerry Fielding answered my call for assistance. The advice received from that esteemed group led me to search for a funding source that could make this program possible. By searching "judicial independence" in Google, I found the Joyce Foundation of Chicago. I called them without any prior knowledge, except that they had a keen interest in preserving the independence of the judiciary, according to their web page. I spoke to a very thoughtful person by the name of Larry Hansen, who is the foundation's vice president. He seemed interested in the project and even more interested in the AJA. His interest was demonstrated by his shep-

herding of this project over the next year. The result was a \$100,000 grant from the Joyce Foundation to put on the National Forum.

The AJA could not have obtained this grant without the professional guidance and assistance of the National Center for State Courts, specifically David Rottman, Ph.D., of the National Center's Research Division. He prepared the grant application and has guided the project's execution since then. Special thanks should go to the California Chief Justice Ron George



and the California Administrative Office of the Courts, led by Director William C. Vickrey and Chief Deputy Director Ronald G. Overholt. They and their staff have been extremely helpful and generous in assisting the AJA in this important project.

Finally, this Forum is a major achievement for the AJA and its members. An organization of 2,200 judges from every state and level of court jurisdiction *should* host a wide-ranging discussion of this important issue. Our members face questions from the public, the media, and the two other branches of government about budgets, judicial elections, and problem-solving courts, all of which impact judicial independence. These questions deserve to be answered thoughtfully and in a positive fashion. Judicial independence should not be a cover for an arrogant judiciary or an unaccountable one. The public we serve should be informed about the history and the necessity of judicial independence, both as the overarching, institutional foundation for the third branch of government and the specific basis for a neutral judge, on the individual case level.