



Judicial Campaign Watch

Wisconsin
Judicial Campaign
Integrity Committee

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 20, 2009

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Chair
Thomas J. Basting, Sr.

Members

Dean R. Dietrich
Dennis L. Dresang
Joseph P. Heim
John M. Laabs
Neal Nettesheim

Panel Will Monitor State Supreme Court Campaign

The State Bar has reconstituted the Wisconsin Judicial Campaign Integrity Committee (WJCIC) to help voters make informed choices in the April 7, 2009 Supreme Court Election. "Our central message is that while judges, including Supreme Court Justices, are elected in Wisconsin much like other public officials, the role of judges is different than that of legislators, governors and other elected officials who represent various constituencies and advocate policy goals," explains committee chair Tom Basting.

"The role of judges in our system of government is to fairly and impartially apply the rule of law," Basting adds. "This means that some of the standards voters typically use when evaluating candidates don't apply to judges. It also means that campaign messages from judicial candidates and their supporters should reflect the unique role of judges in our system of government."

Basting serves as the committee's non-voting chair, other members are:

- Attorney Dean R. Dietrich
- Professor Dennis L. Dresang;
- Professor Joseph P. Heim;
- John M. Laabs; and
- Former Appellate Court Judge Neal Nettesheim.

Other state bars have chartered similar committees to scrutinize statewide judicial elections; the Wisconsin initiative is modeled on one such successful project in Ohio.

In addition to educating the public about the unique roles and responsibilities of judges, the committee will review judicial campaign materials produced by candidates and their supporters to determine if they violate relevant portions of Wisconsin's Code of Judicial Conduct, including:

- Conduct that undermines the integrity and independence of the judiciary;
- Promises and commitments that are inconsistent with impartial justice; or
- Knowingly misrepresenting facts concerning a candidate or opponent.

It may ask a candidate to withdraw any judicial campaign materials (if controlled by the candidate) or to publicly repudiate non-compliant judicial campaign materials produced by third parties (a copy of the pledge form is attached).

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February 20, 2009
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The committee requested that both Supreme Court candidates sign a pledge developed by the committee affirming their intention to conduct their campaigns in accordance with all applicable state laws, including the Code of Judicial Conduct. Chief Justice Shirley S. Abrahamson has returned a signed pledge; her opponent, Jefferson County Circuit Court Judge Randy R. Koschnick, has not.

“Judicial campaigns here in Wisconsin and across the country have changed dramatically in recent years, including the expenditure of large amounts of cash by interest groups that seek to tilt the courts in one direction or another,” Basting said. “To the extent that these developments impugn the neutrality of our courts and erode public confidence in them, this trend must be resisted.”

Bios of WJCIC Members

Thomas J. Basting, Sr. is the Immediate Past President of the State Bar of Wisconsin and a member of Midwest Mediation, LLC in Madison. He is also: past chair of the State Bar of Wisconsin’s Standing Committee on Professional Ethics; past chair of the State Bar Litigation Section; Special Counsel to the Office of Lawyer Regulation; and special investigator and counsel to the Wisconsin Judicial Commission. Mr. Basting has served as investigator and special prosecutor for the State of Wisconsin Ethics Board. He is a Certified Civil Trial Advocate by the National Board of Trial Advocacy, Fellow of the American College of Trial Lawyers, and a Fellow of the International Society of Barristers. He is currently a member of the Educational Communications Board and is President of the Board of the Friends of WHA-TV. Mr. Basting received his B.S. degree from Marquette University in 1959 and his J.D. from the University of Wisconsin Law School in 1962.

Dean R. Dietrich is a partner with the Ruder Ware Law Firm where he represents private and public sector employers in all aspects of labor and employment law. He is a graduate of Marquette University (B.S., 1974) and Marquette University Law School (J.D., 1977).

Since July 1991, Mr. Dietrich has served on the State Bar of Wisconsin’s Committee on Professional Ethics. He currently serves as Chair of the Committee and served as Chair from 2000-2002. He also served on the Committee appointed by the Wisconsin Supreme Court to review and propose changes to Chapter 20, the Rules of Professional Conduct for Attorneys. Mr. Dietrich served as Treasurer of the State Bar of Wisconsin from 2001-2005.

Mr. Dietrich has been a frequent presenter and author on the topic of professional ethics and professional responsibility. He has represented attorneys in matters before the Wisconsin Supreme Court Office of Lawyer Regulation and has consulted with numerous law firms and lawyers regarding compliance with the Rules of Professional Conduct.

Dennis L. Dresang is a Professor of Political Science and Public Affairs at the University of Wisconsin -- Madison. He chaired the Political Science Department from 1990 to 1993 and from 1999 to 2001 and was Founding Director of the La Follette Institute of Public Affairs. Dresang was Director of the State of Wisconsin’s Employment Relations Study Commission in 1976 to 1977. He also served on the Editorial Board of *Review of Public Personnel Administration* since 1987 and as: Vice-Chair, City of Madison and Dane County Committee to Unify Public Health Services, 1998 to 2002; member, Civil Service Commission, Dane County, 1990 to 2001; Vice-Chair, Glass Ceiling Task Force, Dane County, 1994 to 1995; Chair, Task Force on Comparable Worth, State of Wisconsin, 1984 to 86; and many other civic and academic positions. He earned his B.A. from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1964, his M.A. from the University of California -- Los Angeles in 1965 and his Ph.D. from the University of California -- Los Angeles in 1971.

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Joseph P. Heim is a Professor of Political Science and Director of the Public Administration Program at the University of Wisconsin -- La Crosse. He is an election and politics commentator for Wisconsin Public Television and other media and serves on the Wisconsin Educational Approval Board and as UW -- La Crosse Legislative Liaison. Past appointments include the Wisconsin State Legislative Council Special Committee on Local Government Funding (1999-2000); County of La Crosse Committee on County Board Size Executive Reorganization (1988); and the Government Resources Committee, United Coulee Region (1999 to 2001). He is active in the American Political Science Association, the American Society for Public Administrators, the Wisconsin Political Science Association, the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters and the U.S. Capitol Historical Society. Professor Heim earned his M.A. degree in Political Science from Marquette University Graduate School in 1968 and his Ph.D. in Political Science from University of Wisconsin -- Milwaukee in 1976.

John M. Laabs is President, CEO and member of the Board of Directors for the Wisconsin Broadcasters Association Foundation, the charitable, educational and research organization affiliated with the WBA. In addition, he is the executive producer and host of the Foundation's Political Debate Series, presented in all Wisconsin television markets in state gubernatorial and U.S. Senate election campaigns. From 1987 to 2007, Mr. Laabs served as the President of the WBA, a 325-member trade association representing commercial and non-commercial radio and television interests in Wisconsin. Prior to joining the WBA, Mr. Laabs worked as the executive assistant to the secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Revenue and for the Wisconsin Counties Association, as well as holding various positions for members of Congress and the Wisconsin Legislature. Mr. Laabs graduated from the University of Wisconsin in 1972.

Neal Nettlesheim was Wisconsin's second-longest sitting judge at the time of his retirement in 2007. He was in private practice from 1966 to 1975, when he became a Waukesha County Judge. He served as a Waukesha County Circuit Court Judge from 1975 to 1983, when he was appointed to the District II of the Wisconsin Court of Appeals by Governor Tony Earl. Judge Nettlesheim also served as Chief Judge of the Court of Appeals from 1990 – 93.

In addition to serving on the bench, Judge Nettlesheim played an exceptionally active role in promoting judicial education and excellence. He served on the state's Judicial Education Committee, which oversees continuing education programs for judges and was Dean of the Wisconsin Judicial College, which provides orientation and training for newly elected or appointed judges and a refresher for sitting judges, from 1987 – 1993. Judge Nettlesheim is also active in the State Bar of Wisconsin, where he has served on the State Bar Mentor Council and the Bench Bar Committee, which studies the organization, operation and general administration of Wisconsin courts, including practice and procedure issues.

Judge Nettlesheim earned his B.A. from Northwestern University in 1963 and his J.D. from Marquette University in 1966.

For more information, visit the committee's website at: <http://www.wifaircourts.com>

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