

THE DISTRICT LINE



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What Are They Trying To Hide?

The American Bar Association ended its annual convention by adopting "a new code of judicial conduct" and an "overhaul of ethical canons for judges."

The revision had been planned for more than a decade. When it was passed, it was hailed as the greatest advance in civilization since sliced bread.

But the ABA rejected a proposal that judges be required to disclose their investments and financial involvements. A series of scandals involving judges had brought demands that the new code require financial disclosure. But the demands were turned down, and the new code states that "forced divulgence of stock income, debts, and net worth would invade the privacy of judges."

What hogwash! A man who seeks public office invades his own privacy. He presents himself to the public for its approval in the

full knowledge that the public will have a lively and legitimate interest in the candidate's personal life, and particularly in his financial dealings. He knows when he goes after the job that every public servant is accountable to the public.

Knowledge of where and how a man makes his money is a key factor in forming a judgment about him. The judge who thinks the public has no right to know about a judge's finances is not fit to serve as a judge.

Shame on the ABA for aiding and abetting this brazen attempt to prevent the public from having access to information it needs.

The more embarrassed a judge would be to have his financial manipulations known, the more determined press and public ought to be to find out what he's trying to hide.

The judge who values his privacy is always free to go back to the private practice of law. The fact that few step down voluntarily indicates that they like the job and prefer not to find out precisely how much privacy private practice would produce. It might be considerably more than they really yearn for.