

HALT Action Alert to Iowa Members

Dear Iowa HALT Member:

We are writing today to ask for your support for important legislation that will bring sunshine to the financial holdings of federal judges and help put an end to junkets for judges.

On Thursday, May 22, 2003, the United States Senate Judiciary Committee is expected to mark up S. 1023, which will authorize a 16.5 percent increase in the salary of federal judges.

In March, Senator Patrick Leahy introduced a similar bill, the Fair and Independent Judiciary Act of 2003, which linked the judicial pay raise to reforms that allow public access to lists of judges' disqualifying financial interests and prevent judges from accepting gifts from special interests. Leahy's proposed reforms would also establish a public fund to pay for judges' attendance at seminars screened by the judiciary. We expect these important reform provisions will be offered as amendments to S. 1023.

Enacting these reforms is critically important. Investigative reports by the *Washington Post*, *Kansas City Star* and public interest organizations have thoroughly documented the surprisingly large problem of judges presiding over cases despite a disqualifying financial interest. As Iowa Senator Charles Grassley noted in a letter to the Administrative Office of the Courts in 1998, current disclosure law "makes it difficult and intimidating for the public to help police the judges' compliance." Leahy's proposals would allow the public to have full access to judges' financial interests.

The problem of special interests using expense-paid trips to lavish settings in a thinly-veiled attempt to lobby federal judges has been equally well documented. HALT supports a moderate solution to this problem by banning gifts for multi-day educational seminars for judges and providing new funding for privately-run seminars screened by the judiciary.

The deciding vote will likely be Senator Grassley, a long-standing champion of accountability who has, in the past, endorsed some of these reform provisions.

So we urge you to call and write to Senator Grassley today and voice your support for these critical reforms. Time is of the essence – all comments from the public must be received by Senator Grassley's office by Thursday, May 22. These important reform provisions could make a real difference for Iowans when they have to go to court. Please call Senator Grassley's office today at (202) 224-3744, use the sample letter on the reverse side or complete an online form at <http://grassley.senate.gov/webform.htm>. Please forward a copy to HALT so we can track our progress.

Sincerely,

James C. Turner
Executive Director

Suzanne Mishkin
Director, Lawyer Accountability Project

