

Judges must not bend with winds of opinion

Domestic violence deserves the serious attention of the community, police, attorneys and judges.

Beginning in 1971, I worked to raise public consciousness about chronic abuse of women by their husbands and boyfriends. One significant result was the creation of the House of Ruth, a shelter for battered women and their children.

Recent clamor about the insensitivity to victims of such abuse shown by a Circuit Court judge highlights the growing public intolerance of domestic violence. This increased public awareness is heartening. But important as it is for people to understand that abuse must not be tolerated, we must not sacrifice the independence of the judiciary in our efforts to protect victims of abuse.

Judges must not follow the public will. The public and victims are entitled to their outrage and desire for revenge, but judges must be objective and represent justice, even if it means the risk of losing an increase in judicial compensation.

Of course judges must be accountable — accountable to the principles of justice and mercy. A distinguished Oregon jurist said to an audience at the National Judicial College last August that a judge is not aligned with the state or part of the law enforcement system; the judge stands between the state and the individual whom the community puts on trial.

An independent judiciary, the cornerstone of our democracy, preserves justice and secures our liberty. We must cherish and protect it to remain free.

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