

We All Have a Right to Know
By Attorney Chuck Hurley
President of the Iowa Family Policy Center

Why should Iowans be asked every two years to vote on judges without adequate information? That's the question the U.S. Supreme Court resolved in 2002, formally concluding that "voter ignorance" about judges is wrong and should be stopped. Iowans Concerned About Judges agree, as do virtually all conscientious voters! In fact, just yesterday I was biking past two construction workers who, unsolicited, stopped me and said they think it's "crazy" to have judges on the ballot, and not know where they stand on critical issues such as right to life, and marriage.

Despite the claims of some, gaining this resource for responsible citizenship will not create bias or impartiality in the courts. The 2002 U.S. Supreme Court White case makes it clear that impartiality refers to how a judge treats a particular party, not whether the judge has an opinion on legal issues that come before him or her. The White case says it's absurd to think that a judge would not already have an opinion on what the law is, and it's wrong to hide that opinion from voters.

Survey critics are also mistaken in not reading the questionnaire carefully. Judges can and should reveal their judicial philosophy on important issues without promising to reach any particular result in any particular case. We surely wouldn't expect voters to vote for any other candidate if that candidate refused to give the voters information on their governing philosophy regarding important issues.

Just because the first organizations to seek this information in Iowa since the White case have a conservative philosophy, doesn't make our inquiry illegitimate. Leftist organizations, business groups, etc., have the same First Amendment rights to gather this pertinent information.

Finally, the survey critics should read the Iowa Constitution. They would be reminded that the very first sections of Article 1 gives We the People "inalienable" rights, and says we instituted our government to protect those. How can we elect good officials when we don't know what they believe about protecting our most cherished rights?