

## CANON 4

**A JUDGE OR CANDIDATE FOR JUDICIAL OFFICE SHALL NOT ENGAGE IN POLITICAL OR CAMPAIGN ACTIVITY THAT IS INCONSISTENT WITH THE INDEPENDENCE, INTEGRITY, OR IMPARTIALITY OF THE JUDICIARY.**

**Rule 4.1 Political and Campaign Activities of Judges and Judicial Candidates in General**

(A) Except as permitted by law, or by Rules 4.2, 4.3, and 4.4, a judge or a judicial candidate shall not:

- (1) act as leader in a political organization;
- (2) make speeches on behalf of a political organization;
- (3) publicly endorse or, except for the judge or candidate's opponent, publicly oppose another candidate for public office;
- (4)(a) solicit funds for a political organization or a candidate for public office, or (b) make a contribution to a candidate for public office;
- (5) attend or purchase tickets for dinners or other events sponsored by a candidate for public office;
- (6) personally solicit or accept campaign contributions other than as authorized by Rules 4.2 and 4.4;
- (7) use or permit the use of campaign contributions for the private benefit of the judge, the candidate, or others;
- (8) use court staff, facilities, or other court resources in a campaign for judicial office in a manner prohibited by state law or judicial branch personnel policies;
- (9) knowingly, or with reckless disregard for the truth, make any false or misleading statement;
- (10) make any statement that would reasonably be expected to affect the outcome or impair the fairness of a matter pending or impending in any court; or
- (11) in connection with cases, controversies, or issues that are likely to come before the court, make pledges, promises, or commitments that are inconsistent with the impartial performance of the adjudicative duties of judicial office.

(B) A judge or judicial candidate shall take reasonable measures to ensure that other persons do not undertake, on behalf of the judge or judicial candidate, any activities prohibited under paragraph (A), except as permitted by Rule 4.4.

***Comment******General Considerations***

*[1] Even when subject to public election, a judge plays a role different from that of a legislator or executive branch official. Rather than making decisions based upon the expressed views or preferences of the electorate, a judge makes decisions based upon the law and the facts of every case. Therefore, in furtherance of this interest, judges and judicial candidates must, to the greatest extent possible, be free and appear to be free from political influence and political pressure. This Canon imposes narrowly tailored restrictions upon the political and campaign activities of all judges and judicial candidates, taking into account the various methods of selecting judges.*

[2] *When a person becomes a judicial candidate, this Canon becomes applicable to his or her conduct.*

### **Participation in Political Activities**

[3] *Public confidence in the independence and impartiality of the judiciary is eroded if judges or judicial candidates are perceived to be subject to political influence. Although judges and judicial candidates may register to vote as members of a political party, they are prohibited by paragraph (A)(1) from assuming leadership roles in political organizations. Examples of such leadership roles include precinct or block captains and delegates or alternates to political conventions. Such positions would be inconsistent with an independent and impartial judiciary.*

[4] *Paragraphs (A)(2) and (A)(3) prohibit judges and judicial candidates from making speeches on behalf of political organizations or publicly endorsing or opposing candidates for public office, respectively, to prevent them from abusing the prestige of judicial office to advance the interests of others. See Rule 1.3.*

[5] *Although members of the families of judges and judicial candidates are free to engage in their own political activity, including running for public office, there is no "family exception" to the prohibition in paragraph (A)(3) against a judge or candidate publicly endorsing candidates for public office. A judge or judicial candidate must not become involved in, or publicly associated with, a family member's political activity or campaign for public office. To avoid public misunderstanding, judges and judicial candidates should take, and should urge members of their families to take, reasonable steps to avoid any implication that they endorse any family member's candidacy or other political activity.*

[6] *Judges and judicial candidates retain the right to participate in the political process as voters in both primary and general elections. For purposes of this Canon, participation in a caucus-type election procedure does not constitute public support for or endorsement of a political organization or candidate, and is not prohibited by paragraphs (A)(2) or (A)(3).*

### **Statements and Comments Made during a Campaign for Judicial Office**

[7] *Judicial candidates must be scrupulously fair and accurate in all statements made by them and by their campaign committees. Paragraph (A)(9) obligates candidates and their committees to refrain from knowingly making statements that are false or misleading, or that omit facts necessary to make the communication considered as a whole not materially misleading.*

[8] *Judicial candidates are sometimes the subject of false, misleading, or unfair allegations made by opposing candidates, third parties, or the media. For example, false or misleading statements might be made regarding the identity, present position, experience, qualifications, or judicial rulings of a candidate. In other situations, false or misleading allegations may be made that bear upon a candidate's integrity or fitness for judicial office. As long as the candidate does not violate paragraphs (A)(9), (A)(10), or (A)(11), the candidate may make a factually accurate public response. In addition, when an independent third party has made unwarranted attacks on a candidate's opponent, the candidate may disavow the attacks, and request the third party to cease and desist.*

[9] *Subject to paragraph (A)(10), a judicial candidate is permitted to respond directly to false, misleading, or unfair allegations made against him or her during a campaign, although it is preferable for someone else to respond if the allegations relate to a pending case.*

[10] *Paragraph (A)(10) prohibits judicial candidates from making comments that might impair the fairness of pending or impending judicial proceedings. This provision does not restrict arguments*

*or statements to the court or jury by a lawyer who is a judicial candidate, or rulings, statements, or instructions by a judge that may appropriately affect the outcome of a matter.*

***Pledges, Promises, or Commitments Inconsistent with Impartial Performance of the Adjudicative Duties of Judicial Office***

*[11] The role of a judge is different from that of a legislator or executive branch official, even when the judge is subject to public election. Campaigns for judicial office must be conducted differently from campaigns for other offices. The narrowly drafted restrictions upon political and campaign activities of judicial candidates provided in Canon 4 allow candidates to conduct campaigns that provide voters with sufficient information to permit them to distinguish between candidates and make informed electoral choices.*

*[12] Paragraph (A)(11) makes applicable to both judges and judicial candidates the prohibition that applies to judges in Rule 2.10(B), relating to pledges, promises, or commitments that are inconsistent with the impartial performance of the adjudicative duties of judicial office.*

*[13] The making of a pledge, promise, or commitment is not dependent upon, or limited to, the use of any specific words or phrases; instead, the totality of the statement must be examined to determine if a reasonable person would believe that the candidate for judicial office has specifically undertaken to reach a particular result. Pledges, promises, or commitments must be contrasted with statements or announcements of personal views on legal, political, or other issues, which are not prohibited. When making such statements, a judge should acknowledge the overarching judicial obligation to apply and uphold the law, without regard to his or her personal views.*

*[14] A judicial candidate may make campaign promises related to judicial organization, administration, and court management, such as a promise to dispose of a backlog of cases, start court sessions on time, or avoid favoritism in appointments and hiring. A candidate may also pledge to take action outside the courtroom, such as working toward an improved jury selection system, or advocating for more funds to improve the physical plant and amenities of the courthouse.*

*[15] Judicial candidates may receive questionnaires or requests for interviews from the media and from issue advocacy or other community organizations that seek to learn their views on disputed or controversial legal or political issues. Paragraph (A)(11) does not specifically address judicial responses to such inquiries. Depending upon the wording and format of such questionnaires, candidates' responses might be viewed as pledges, promises, or commitments to perform the adjudicative duties of office other than in an impartial way. To avoid violating paragraph (A)(11), therefore, candidates who respond to media and other inquiries should also give assurances that they will keep an open mind and will carry out their adjudicative duties faithfully and impartially if elected. Candidates who do not respond may state their reasons for not responding, such as the danger that answering might be perceived by a reasonable person as undermining a successful candidate's independence or impartiality, or that it might lead to frequent disqualification. See Rule 2.11.*

**Rule 4.2 Political and Campaign Activities of Judicial Candidates in Public Elections**

(A) A judicial candidate in a public election shall:

(1) act at all times in a manner consistent with the independence, integrity, and impartiality of the judiciary;

(2) comply with all applicable election, election campaign, and election campaign fund-raising laws and regulations of this jurisdiction;

(3) review and approve the content of all campaign statements and materials produced by the candidate or his or her campaign committee, as authorized by Rule 4.4, before their dissemination;

(4) take reasonable measures to ensure that other persons do not undertake on behalf of the candidate activities, other than those described in Rule 4.4, that the candidate is prohibited from doing by Rule 4.1; and

(5) take reasonable measures to ensure that the candidate will not obtain any information identifying those who contribute or refuse to contribute to the candidate's campaign.

(B) A candidate for elective judicial office may, unless prohibited by law:

(1) establish a campaign committee pursuant to the provisions of Rule 4.4;

(2) speak on behalf of his or her candidacy through any medium, including but not limited to advertisements, Web sites, or other campaign literature; and

(3)(a) make a general request for campaign contributions when speaking to an audience of 20 or more people;

(b) sign letters, for distribution by the candidate's campaign committee, soliciting campaign contributions, if the letters direct contributions to be sent to the address of the candidate's campaign committee and not that of the candidate; and

(c) personally solicit campaign contributions from members of the judge's family or from a person with whom the judge has an intimate relationship.

#### ***Comment***

*[1] Paragraph (B) permits judicial candidates in public elections to engage in some political and campaign activities otherwise prohibited by Rule 4.1.*

*[2] Despite paragraph (B), judicial candidates for public election remain subject to many of the provisions of Rule 4.1. For example, a candidate continues to be prohibited from soliciting funds for a political organization, knowingly making false or misleading statements during a campaign, or making certain promises, pledges, or commitments related to future adjudicative duties. See Rule 4.1, paragraphs (A)(4), (A)(9), and (A)(11).*

*[3] Judicial candidates are permitted to attend or purchase tickets for dinners and other events sponsored by political organizations.*

#### **Rule 4.3 Activities of Candidates for Appointive Judicial Office**

A candidate for appointment to judicial office may:

(A) communicate with the appointing or confirming authority, including any selection, screening, or nominating commission or similar agency; and

(B) seek support for the appointment from organizations and from individuals to the extent requested, required, or permitted by the appointing authority or the nominating commission.

#### ***Comment***

*[1] When seeking support or endorsement, or when communicating directly with an appointing or confirming authority, a candidate for appointive judicial office must not make any pledges, promises, or commitments that are inconsistent with the impartial performance of the adjudicative duties of the office. See Rule 4.1(A)(11).*

**Rule 4.4 Campaign Committees**

(A) A judicial candidate subject to public election may establish a campaign committee to manage and conduct a campaign for the candidate, subject to the provisions of this Code. The candidate is responsible for ensuring that his or her campaign committee complies with applicable provisions of this Code and other applicable law.

(B) A judicial candidate subject to public election shall direct his or her campaign committee:

(1) to solicit and accept only campaign contributions in an amount allowed by law;

(2) to comply with all applicable statutory requirements for reporting, disclosure, and divestiture of campaign contributions; and

(3) not to disclose to the candidate the identity of campaign contributors nor to disclose to the candidate the identity of those who were solicited for contribution and refused such solicitation. The candidate may be advised of aggregate contribution information in a manner that does not reveal the source(s) of the contributions.

(Amended effective December 31, 2013.)

***Comment***

*[1] Judicial candidates are prohibited from personally soliciting campaign contributions or personally accepting campaign contributions except as provided by Rule 4.2(B)(3). See Rule 4.1(A)(6). This Rule recognizes that judicial candidates must raise campaign funds to support their candidacies, and permits candidates, other than candidates for appointive judicial office, to establish campaign committees to solicit and accept contributions.*

*[2] Campaign committees may solicit and accept campaign contributions, manage the expenditure of campaign funds, and generally conduct campaigns. Candidates are responsible for compliance with the requirements of election law and other applicable law, and for the activities of their campaign committees.*

*[3] At the start of a campaign, the candidate must instruct the campaign committee to solicit or accept only such contributions as are appropriate and in conformity with applicable law. Although lawyers and others who might appear before a successful candidate for judicial office are permitted to make campaign contributions, the candidate should instruct his or her campaign committee to be especially cautious in connection with such contributions, so they do not create grounds for disqualification if the candidate is elected to judicial office. See Rule 2.11.*

**Rule 4.5 Activities of Judges Who Become Candidates for Nonjudicial Office**

(A) Upon becoming a candidate for a nonjudicial elective office, a judge shall resign from judicial office, unless permitted by law to continue to hold judicial office.

(B) Upon becoming a candidate for a nonjudicial appointive office, a judge is not required to resign from judicial office, provided that the judge complies with the other provisions of this Code.

***Comment***

*[1] In campaigns for nonjudicial elective public office, candidates may make pledges, promises, or commitments related to positions they would take and ways they would act if elected to office. Although appropriate in nonjudicial campaigns, this manner of campaigning is inconsistent with the role of a judge, who must remain fair and impartial to all who come before him or her. The potential for misuse of the judicial office, and the political promises that the judge would be*

*compelled to make in the course of campaigning for nonjudicial elective office, together dictate that a judge who wishes to run for such an office must resign upon becoming a candidate.*

*[2] The "resign to run" rule set forth in paragraph (A) ensures that a judge cannot use the judicial office to promote his or her candidacy, and prevents post-campaign retaliation from the judge in the event the judge is defeated in the election. When a judge is seeking appointive nonjudicial office, however, the dangers are not sufficient to warrant imposing the "resign to run" rule.*

*[3] Minnesota Constitution, Article VI, Section 6 prohibits a judge from holding any office under the United States, except a commission in a reserve component of the military forces of the United States, or any other office of the State of Minnesota and provides that the judge's term of office shall terminate at the time the judge files as a candidate for an elective office of the United States or for a nonjudicial office of the State of Minnesota.*