

Surf's Up: WebSurfing for Judges

by Chief Judge Mark W. Bennett



The purpose of this column is to highlight five or so Internet web pages that federal judges may find helpful in assisting with the mission of delivering justice or maybe just find interesting and, on occasion, gossipy or fun. I start with the serious, The Constitution Project, from Georgetown University's Public Policy Institute, seeks to offer "consensus solutions to difficult legal and constitutional issues." The Constitution Project "has earned wide-ranging respect for its expertise in reports" on its seven initiatives which have produced a number of books, reports and other materials. Next is a look at JURIST, a nationally acclaimed law student run legal news service from The University of Pittsburgh School of Law. JURIST "uses the latest Internet technology to track important legal news and materials and present them rapidly, objectively and intelligibly in an accessible, ad-free format." Third is the website for the National Center for State Courts. This website contains comprehensive information about what our brethren in the state courts are doing in court administration, court technology, and jury management and innovations, often with less funding but more creativity than the federal bench. This site is a terrific resource for many court-related issues. The fourth website is actually a blog, Underneath Their Robes, where federal judges are the stars and the blog's creator operates under the pseudonym Article III Groupie ("A3G") and proclaims with glee that "After all, federal judges are people too, with unique personalities, private lives, and peccadilloes, all just waiting to be explored." If you're not careful you, too, may be nominated to participate in the "Hotties of the Federal Judiciary" online contest!!! The fifth website, Gavel2Gavel, provides comprehensive legal information with a section on legal humor that includes the silly and funny things we and our state court colleagues say in our opinions, as well as witness and lawyer humor in pleadings and in the courtroom. I hope you enjoy this column and the websites featured in it. Please e-mail me with your favorite sites to be included in future columns.

The Constitution Project ("CP") is based at Georgetown University's Public Policy Institute. The CP currently has seven initiatives: War Powers, Liberty and Security, Death Penalty, Courts, Constitutional Amendments, Right to Counsel, and Sentencing. Each initiative is guided by a bipartisan, blue-ribbon committee. Several of the nation's largest law firms offer pro bono assistance to the CP. The CP's Board of Directors includes the General Counsel of General Motors Corporation and Judge Abner J. Mikva. You can register on its site for e-mail updates. www.constitutionproject.org

JURIST -- Legal News & Research ("JURIST") is a legal news website "powered by a

team of over 20 law student reporters, editors and web developers led by law professor Bernard Hibbitts” at the University of Pittsburgh School of Law. *The New York Times* called JURIST “the wonderful legal education mega-site” in 2000. In January 2001, the online educational journal Technology Source called JURIST “probably the best educational portal on the Internet today.” JURIST was first launched in 1996 under a different name as a clearinghouse of online legal materials for law professors. It has morphed into a site with “filtered legal news” and “original academic commentary on current legal issues.” www.jurist.law.pitt.edu

The National Center for State Courts (“NCSC”) has a terrific website loaded with helpful online information. “Through original research, consulting services, publications, and national educational programs, NCSC offers solutions that enhance court operations with the latest technology; collects and interprets the latest data on court operations nationwide; and provides information on proven ‘best practices’ for improving court operations in many areas, such as civil case management.” The site offers a plethora of information on many aspects of court technology, including high tech courtrooms, at its online Court Technology Information Center, as well as online information about all aspects of juries at The Center for Jury Studies, including information on jury selection, jury trial management, jury trial innovations, jury decision making and managing notorious trials. You may find all this and much more at www.ncsconline.org

Underneath Their Robes News, gossip, and colorful commentary about the federal judiciary (“UTR”) is hard to beat for pure gossip about federal judges. This is a blog run by Article III Groupie (“A3G”) a self described Ivy League and top 5 law school graduate in the late 90's with “nearly perfect transcripts.” A3G clerked for “a highly respected federal appeals court judge” after multiple Supreme Court clerkship interviews, that “ended in tragedy (i.e., with her not getting a job with the Supremes).” Article III Groupie now works for a large law firm in a major city. Her self stated “goal in life is to become a federal judicial diva.” This blog includes some of the following articles: “Justice Is Blind: Delicious Gossip About Judges Who Shall Remain Nameless”, “Judicial Divas and Hotties” and “Bench-Slapped! Article III Infighting” just to name a few. “UTR Cribs: Inside the Homes of Federal Judges” is described as: “Inspired by MTV Cribs, UTR goes inside the halls of justice, with this exclusive report about the luxurious residences of the most well-heeled federal jurists.” In its June 5, 2004 Mission Statement, A3G writes: “‘Underneath Their Robes’ (‘UTR’) is a combination of People, US Weekly, Page Six, The National Enquirer, and Tigerbeat, focused not on vacuous movie stars or fatuous teen idols, but on the federal judiciary.” The mission of UTR is to get “underneath the robes” of our federal judges, to find out what they are really like--not as impersonal guardians of the Constitution, or as disembodied legal minds analyzing complex legal disputes, but as human beings. “After all, federal judges are people too, with unique personalities, private lives, and peccadilloes, all just waiting to be explored.” underneaththeirrobes.blogs.com (do not use the traditional www before this blog or you will not be able to reach it).

Gavel2Gavel is a comprehensive legal information website with a fun section entitled, “Legal Humor.” This section includes Case Law Humor: “Judges aren’t above saying silly things themselves. Read along with some of the funniest things said in court opinions or those said by attorneys in their legal papers.”; Courtroom Humor: “Read some of the funniest things people have said in open court or during litigation.”; Law Office Humor: “See what happens when the firm’s attorneys, paralegals and secretaries undergo a job review and evaluation. We challenge you to keep a straight face while reading this.”; and Lawyer Jokes (which I personally don’t tell in mixed company): “What’s the difference between a stork and an attorney? Find out here! The funniest lawyer jokes on the Net from our collection of several years. Have a laugh at us, oops, on us.” Just click on the section Legal Humor on the right hand side of this web page at www.Gavel2Gavel.com.

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