

OP-ED

## **Montana ABOTA defends district court judge against unfair attacks by dark money group**

October 7, 2016 — The American Board of Trial Advocates (ABOTA) is an organization dedicated to the preservation of a fair and impartial judiciary and the right to trial by jury. Recently, we have seen attacks upon Montana District Judge Dirk Sandefur, who is currently seeking election to a seat on the Supreme Court of Montana.

These attacks attempt to create the impression that Judge Sandefur has given lenient sentences. The fact is, the sentences handed down by Judge Sandefur in each instance were consistent with the recommendations of the prosecuting attorneys.

ABOTA, the American Board of Trial Advocates, is an invitation only organization dedicated to defending the American civil justice system and elevating the standards of integrity, honor and courtesy in the legal profession. ABOTA members are represented equally between both plaintiff and defense lawyers and includes state and federal judges. ABOTA has a long history of responding to unfair attacks on judges who cannot respond for themselves and believes that political and special interest interference in the judicial system is contrary to the American concept of justice.

The Montana Chapter of ABOTA considers this attack on a district judge to be misleading, unwarranted and unfair. As such, it is a threat to the independence of the judiciary and to the rule of law. An independent, fair and impartial judiciary is the bulwark against the whims, wishes and demands of the government and other special interests.

The Montana Chapter of ABOTA stands for respect of our judicial system and the right of trial by jury as we believe such principles are fundamental to preserving our democracy. Our judicial system cannot function without the lawyers, the litigants and the courts treating each other with civility. It is a system upon which the public can have confidence in and accept the outcome of each case.

This should not be considered an endorsement of either candidate seeking election to the Montana Supreme Court. Montana ABOTA does not endorse political candidates nor does Montana ABOTA become involved in political races.

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