

Juror Appreciation Month calls for a tribute to those who answer the call to jury service. As a judge and former state prosecutor, I have seen thousands of Alaskans serve as jurors throughout our state. Everyone acknowledges the importance of the right to a jury trial. But most folks, at least at the outset, would admit that jury service seems more of an inconvenient imposition than an opportunity to serve. Countless times, however, I have seen this perspective change once people have served on a jury.

Jury service is, plainly speaking, an exercise in patience. Once you enter the courtroom doors, at times you may feel as if time is standing still. Trial is a deliberative process—information needs to be presented in pieces, by the attorneys to the jury. Depending on the complexity of the case, there may be more or less information to communicate. And evidence can be presented in various ways: live testimony, pictures, audio, reports, video, or jury views outside the courtroom of places where the dispute or crime took place. This process necessarily takes time.

Serving on a jury gives a person an up-close view of the legal process. The crux of the jury's role is to determine the facts and the weight to give them in the context of the case being heard. Jurors must observe witnesses and decide who is truthful, who has bias, and who ultimately to believe. Jurors must listen to the attorneys' arguments and the judge's instructions and decide whether the burden of proof has been met. These are important decisions that require careful, thoughtful deliberations.

No less patience is required for judges and attorneys, because the stakes in trials are very high. Criminal trials can determine a person's liberty for years to come, and civil cases can affect a person's business or personal affairs in countless ways. Judges and court staff are committed to making sure that everyone involved has a full and fair opportunity to present their case, and that jurors have the information and support they need to fulfill their vital role in the fact-finding process.

By the end of a trial, I have observed that most jurors have an increased appreciation and understanding of a juror's contribution to justice delivery. The first-hand experience and the weight of their responsibility as fact-finders reaffirms the importance of the right to trial by jury and the necessity of jury service. For most, the experience is a challenging but positive one.

So how do we choose jurors In Alaska? A person over 18 years of age may enter the jury service database in one of two ways. The normal method is by receiving a Permanent Fund Dividend and appearing on the PFD recipient list. So, pass up a PFD check and your name will not appear in the pool for jury service. I have never met a person who selected this course of action. An alternate method is to volunteer. Yes, a person who is qualified under Alaska law to sit as a juror may actually *volunteer* for jury duty. I have never met the person who selected this option, either.

Once in the database, Alaskans can be summoned to the courthouse to join a jury pool from which jury panels will be selected. Not everyone who reports for the jury pool will be seated on a jury panel, but reporting is important nonetheless. A full jury pool ensures that a panel can be drawn from a broad spectrum of the community and be as representative as possible. Without strong community support for jury service, the promise of trial by a jury of one's peers is jeopardized.

As an attorney and judge, I'm well aware of the time and effort jury service takes. But I'm also aware of the difference dedicated jurors make to our justice system. Without them, we simply couldn't function, and those coming before our courts seeking justice would lose one of the fundamental promises of our democracy. So for those of you who have reported for jury service, thank you very much for your time and your efforts. You truly make our justice system work. And to those of you who will be called in the future, thank you in advance for the important role you will serve in the lives of the people in your community.

COMPASS – Jury Service
By Judge Paul Roetman, Kotzebue Superior Court
Anchorage Daily News
November 15, 2012

3

Paul A. Roetman is a superior court judge in Kotzebue, Alaska.