



# American College of Trial Lawyers

## **AMERICAN COLLEGE OF TRIAL LAWYERS DENOUNCES STATEMENTS AGAINST JUDGES MADE BY GOVERNOR NEWSOM AND DONALD TRUMP**

NEWPORT BEACH, CALIFORNIA (September 28, 2023) - The American College of Trial Lawyers (ACTL) condemns the growing number of threats and invective made against judges in recent years. In the last week alone, two troubling examples have received considerable attention.

In the first, California Governor Gavin Newsom attacked U.S. District Roger T. Benitez following the Court's decision in *Duncan v. Bonta*, in which Judge Benitez declared a California statute prohibiting the possession and use of firearm magazines holding more than ten rounds to be unconstitutional. In a tweet posted on September 22, Governor Newsom characterized Judge Benitez as "an extremist, right-wing zealot with no regard to human life" and suggested that he and other federal judges are "NRA-owned."

In the second incident, Donald Trump, former president of the United States, attacked New York State Judge Arthur F. Engoron following the Court's decision granting partial summary judgment against Mr. Trump and other defendants in the New York State Attorney General's civil lawsuit alleging that Mr. Trump and others committed fraud by submitting false and misleading financial statements. In a message posted on Truth Social on September 26, Mr. Trump characterized Judge Engoron as "a DERANGED New York State Judge, doing the bidding of a completely biased and corrupt 'Prosecutor'," "a highly politicized Democrat judge," and "Corrupt."

The College recognizes that decisions from our courts may incite strong reactions and criticisms. Every citizen has a right to disagree with a decision and challenge it for its conclusions, soundness and potential consequences, but statements by public figures such as those by Governor Newsom and Mr. Trump that intend intimidation of a judge because of a given ruling, that attack a judge on personal grounds, or contend, without basis, that a decision was influenced by a political party or lobby call into question the integrity and independence of our judicial system and place our democracy at risk. Any effort to diminish the independence of the decision-making process undermines a vital element of our judicial system.

Founded in 1950, the American College is dedicated to maintaining and improving the standards of trial practice, professional ethics, and the administration of justice. The College is an invitation-only fellowship of lawyers in the United States and Canada who have achieved acknowledged distinction in trial practice. The College has no ties to any political party or any partisan endeavors. The Mission Statement of the College underscores the critical importance to our democracy of an independent judiciary and respect for the rule of law. We write today to emphasize those principles. Judges must decide cases with faithfulness to the law, without fear or favor, and free from the influence of political storms or other external pressure.

We call upon all lawyers and their professional organizations to rededicate themselves to preserving a fair and impartial court system. Our obligations as lawyers to our system of justice and to those who serve on the bench demand no less of us.

### **About the [American College of Trial Lawyers](#)**

The American College of Trial Lawyers comprises the best of the trial bar from the United States, Canada and Puerto Rico and is widely considered to be the premier professional trial organization in North America. Founded in 1950, the College is an invitation only fellowship. The College thoroughly investigates each nominee for admission and selects only those who have demonstrated the very highest standards of trial advocacy, ethical conduct, integrity, professionalism and collegiality. The College maintains and seeks to improve the standards of



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trial practice, professionalism, ethics, and the administration of justice through education and public statements on important legal issues relating to its mission. The College strongly supports the independence of the judiciary, trial by jury, respect for the rule of law, access to justice, and fair and just representation of all parties to legal proceedings.

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