

Jury Rigged?

**By Reg P. Wydeven
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Last week one of my partners got called in for jury duty. He was absolutely buried in work, so a few of us jokingly made up some wacky excuses for him to get out of it. We were only kidding, of course, as serving on a jury is a very important role for an American citizen.

The right to a trial by jury is the cornerstone of our country's justice system. A jury can decide two types of cases: civil and criminal. In civil cases, a jury must decide on facts in dispute after hearing evidence presented by both parties. The jury will find in favor of one party and award damages if warranted.

In a criminal trial, the jury must decide whether a defendant is guilty or not guilty as to each charge or count against him. Accordingly, a jury literally holds a person's life and liberty in their hands. That's why the most important qualities of a juror are fairness and impartiality. Jurors must set aside any biases or prejudices they may have.

So my partner gladly showed up for jury duty to proudly serve his civic duty. He arrived with a large pool of other residents chosen at random from the Wisconsin Department of Transportation's list of people with driver's licenses or ID cards living in our county.

To serve, county residents must be at least 18 years old, a U.S. citizen, and able to understand English. People convicted of a felony are not eligible, however. The law requires you to serve as a juror if selected. Jurors are paid for their services, though, getting at least \$16 a day plus reimbursement for travel. Also, jurors cannot be penalized by their employers for missing work.

While my partner was buried at work, that will not likely result in him being excused from service. A court may forgive a person from jury service if it would cause undue hardship, extreme inconvenience, or serious obstruction or delay of justice. In such a circumstance, the court may defer service to a later date.

That still doesn't stop some folks from trying to use those wacky excuses. Take Susan Cole, for example. The 57-year-old Denver resident was dismissed from jury duty after showing up in hair curlers, wearing mismatched shoes, reindeer socks and a T-shirt reading, "Ask me about my best seller."

Even the court reporter Kelli Wessels, questioned her competence, saying, "Her makeup looked like something you would wear during a theater performance." Wessels went on to say, "When the judge asked the entire panel if anyone had a mental illness, (Cole) stated she had difficulties getting ready in the morning, which was apparent to me by the way she was dressed."

After being dismissed, Cole, using a pseudonym, called in to a local Denver radio show hosted by KOA's Dave Logan. She bragged about her ploy to get out of jury duty by pretending to be mentally ill, explaining she had been emotionally upset that morning and also had "too much on my platter" to serve.

Unfortunately for Cole, the judge in the courtroom where she was called to serve is a fan of Dave Logan's radio show. After hearing Cole boast about her exploit, the judge had her charged with perjury.

The ironic part is that Cole's fate will be decided by 12 of her peers who didn't weasel their way out of jury duty. She better bring her toothbrush.