

## Judicial Profile

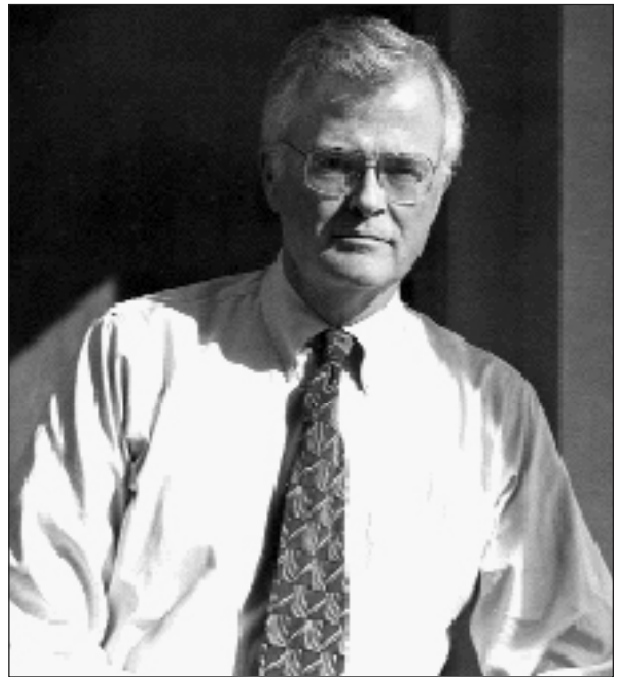
KELLY J. SAVAGE

# Hon. William Alsup U.S. District Judge for the Northern District of California

## *A No-Nonsense Judge Who Takes the Pursuit of Justice Seriously*

JUDGE WILLIAM ALSUP of the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California is a charming, charismatic Southerner. He originally planned a career in engineering, but while attending Mississippi State University during the heart of the civil rights movement—and actively promoting desegregation while he was on campus—his plans changed. As president of the student YMCA, in 1947 he helped bring Aaron Henry, the president of the Mississippi chapter of the NAACP, to the university as the first African-American speaker to address the faculty and students. (This was accomplished in spite of an initial veto of Henry's appearance by the state Board of Trustees, who later backed down under threat of a First Amendment lawsuit in federal court.) That experience and other similar ones led the future judge to subsequently pursue both a law degree and a master's degree in public policy from Harvard University.

After graduation, Judge Alsup clerked for U.S. Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas, whom he fondly recalls. After a brief practice in Mississippi, William Alsup began a 25-year career with the San Francisco firm Morrison & Foerster. From 1978 to 1980, he took a leave of absence from the firm to serve as an assistant solicitor general during the Carter administration. In that role, he argued six cases before the U.S. Supreme Court and handled dozens of other Supreme Court matters. After returning to private practice for almost 20 years, in 1999 he was appointed to the U.S.



District Court for the Northern District of California by President Bill Clinton. Judge Alsup left a successful law practice to join the federal bench because of his faith in our judicial system and a keen desire to work for its success.

### **Improving Our Court System One Case at a Time**

Judge Alsup is tough but fair, smart, and hardworking. Because he believes that justice delayed is justice denied, he works diligently in civil cases to ensure that litigants are given a "fair trial soon—usually within one year of the initial conference." To achieve this goal, he actively manages his docket and is at his desk by 5:30 a.m. He keeps the discovery process moving by setting a reasonable discovery schedule at the beginning of each case and by rarely, if ever, granting extensions. Discovery disputes are handled expeditiously and usually resolved within one week.

Judge Alsup is prepared for all hearings over which he presides. He usually issues a written order within five days of a hearing. He is most impressed by those attorneys who are straightforward and willing

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to concede a weak argument in favor of the strongest one. He knows the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure and the Federal Rules of Evidence and enforces them. Judge Alsup does not pressure counsel to settle cases; instead, for that purpose he relies on the inexorable march of the pretrial schedule toward a foreseeable day of reckoning. During his eight years on the bench, he has tried to follow the law, judging each case on the merits. His impeccable work ethic and integrity have earned him a reputation as a model federal district judge and the respect of all who practice before him.

The judge expects counsel to maintain the highest traditions of our federal courts. He has found excellent lawyering to be a blessing to the country's over-worked judges. Lawyers' abusive tactics or half-truths uttered by them will draw his express disappointment, perhaps even a sanction. In one instance, a millionaire Silicon Valley executive fabricated evidence in a vehemently contested patent case. Judge Alsup referred the matter to the U.S. attorney's office, which led to a perjury prosecution. In at least two other cases, he has referred lawyers to the state bar for investigation.

### **Beyond the Courtroom**

In addition to his judicial duties, Judge Alsup spends considerable time exploring the Sierra Nevada Mountains. He has made more than 100 explorations of the area and has authored two books, both historic accounts published by the Yosemite Association: *Such a Landscape!* (1999), which retraces the 1864 expedition of the California Geological Survey; and *Missing in the Minarets: The Search for Walter A. Starr, Jr.* (2005), an account of the 1933 disappearance in the Minaret mountains of lawyer and mountaineer Walter "Pete" Starr, while on a solo expedition south of Yosemite. Judge Alsup is also an accomplished photographer. Several of his captivating black-and-white photographs are featured in the attorneys' lounge in the federal courthouse in northern California. **TFL**

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