

## The International Program – Vietnam



Judicial Watch President Tom Fitton met with a delegation from Vietnam on June 18, 2009, at its headquarters in Washington, DC. The delegates were in the United States as part of an educational project entitled the “American Legal System and Legal Education.” This project was arranged by the Academy for Educational Development on behalf of the U.S. Department of State.

The visiting delegates serve in different areas of Vietnamese government, to include the Ministry of Public Security, Vietnam’s Supreme People’s Procuracy, and the Criminal Law Faculty at Ho Chi Minh City University of Law.

The U.S. Department of State’s [country profile](#) indicates that there has been a maturing economic relationship between the United States and Vietnam since 2001. This culminated in 2007 with Congressional approval of Permanent Normal Trade Relations (PNTR) for Vietnam. And in January 2008, Vietnam began a two-year term on the UN Security Council. Although the Communist Party of Vietnam has reaffirmed its central role in Vietnamese society, “adherence to ideological orthodoxy has become less important than economic development as a national priority.” In evidence of this phenomenon was the recent passage of “comprehensive religious freedom legislation, outlawing forced renunciations and permitting the official recognition of new denominations.”

One of the goals of the Project for Vietnam was to “showcase measures that foster transparency in government by exploring the decentralization and self regulating nature of federalism in the United States.” Mr. Fitton was asked to discuss Judicial Watch’s efforts at enforcing transparency in government.

As set forth in its [Mission Statement](#), “through its educational endeavors, Judicial Watch advocates high standards of ethics and morality in our nation’s public life and

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seeks to ensure that political and judicial officials do not abuse the powers entrusted to them by the American people. Judicial Watch fulfills its educational mission through litigation, investigations, and public outreach.” [The International Program](#) is an integral part of its educational program.

Mr. Fitton provided the delegates with a general overview of Judicial Watch’s mission and discussed in more detail the impact open records laws, including the federal Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and state and local sunshine laws, have on transparency in government. Several of Judicial Watch’s most famous cases, including the [Clinton Commerce Department trade missions' fiasco](#) and the [Cheney Energy Task Force closed door meetings](#) were discussed. As these two cases illustrate, government secrecy and corruption has been an issue in both Republican and Democratic administrations. Judicial Watch believes corruption is a failure of ethics. Therefore, the mission of transparency in government is to promote ethics and morality by and through the process of openness and accountability.