

Legal Information Institute

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October 8, 1998

Ms. Ann Brownell Sloane
National Center for Automated Information Research
Suite 1B
165 East 72nd Street
New York, NY 10021-4335

Subject: Report on NCAIR Grant in "Support of the Legal Information Institute's Assumption of the full Task of Archiving and Distributing Decisions of the US Supreme Court via the Internet"

Dear Ann:

In late 1996 our institute requested a grant to support its assumption of the full task of archiving and distributing decisions of the Supreme Court via the Internet. The details of the basis for and consequently the terms of the grant are set out in my letter to you dated November 21, 1996. Its penultimate paragraph stated:

The full proposed grant of \$40,000 will be devoted to this project. Since the Institute plans to continue to furnish free distribution of the Court's opinions on the Internet, including timely access to the most recent decisions, the grant will not simply be used to launch this expanded service and to deal with the resulting increased server traffic but to sustain it.

The letter went on to provide an illustrative listing of both immediate and recurring costs the grant would cover.

The premise for the request and grant proved sound. Case Western Reserve dropped its Hermes subscription and the Legal Information Institute applied for and received a direct data feed from the Court. Since early 1997 we have been carrying out the responsibilities set out in our proposal.

This week the LII's Supreme Court server, acquired with funds from the NCAIR grant received the Court's first order lists of the new term, automatically converted them to HTML using software developed here, and placed the individual case items in a database designed and built this summer that will allow case tracking in a way not previously possible. As the grant proposal also suggested we have over this period achieved a close working relationship with the Court's IT staff. This has manifested itself in many ways. Our site provides information on current cases and the argument schedule that comes to us directly from Court staff. When the Court changed from WordPerfect to Word in 1997 and, simultaneously, shifted to the use of PDF format for electronic release of decisions beginning last October, our ability to create a new conversion process (PDF to HTML) was aided by repeated test transmissions from the Court. And other HERMES subscribers with questions about how to deal the new format were directed to us by Court staff.

Each year we have improved the format to which we convert the decisions, increased the level of reference linking (connecting references to the Constitution, U.S. Code, C.F.R. and prior Supreme Court decisions via hypertext links to the cited documents), and added to the editorial material surrounding the collection.

As the Court begins the October 1998 term (hearing argument but not yet handing down any decisions) the LII Supreme Court Web server (<http://supct.law.cornell.edu/supct/>) is handling over 200,000 data

requests a week. (During the end of June when the Court was releasing its final decisions of the last term the volume was close to 300,000.) Another Supreme Court information service we have built on the direct data feed, the e-mail delivered liibulletin, carries summaries of decisions to a list of nearly 20,000 individuals and institutions minutes after they have been handed down.

None of this would have been possible without the NCAIR grant.

I attach a report on the disbursements from the account we established for this grant and activity, through June 30, 1998. At current rates it appears the NCAIR grant will cover at least three more years of free public access to decisions of the U.S. Supreme Court.

I apologize for being so slow in getting this report to you. We are truly grateful for the grant and proud of what it has allowed us to accomplish. If you or the board would like more detail on any point I'll be happy to furnish it.

Sincerely,

Peter W. Martin
Co-Director, LII & Jane M.G. Foster Professor of Law