

WHERE HAVE ALL THE FEDERAL INTERPRETERS GONE?

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As NAJIT enters its fourth decade, one must wonder: why aren't more practicing interpreters dues-paying members? It would be hazardous to guess the total number of judiciary translators and interpreters currently working in the United States, but we do know that approximately 1,000 interpreters are federally certified in Spanish. Of these, only about 30% are NAJIT members.

If you are a thoracic surgeon, would you not want to be a member of the American Association for Thoracic Surgery? If you are an interpreter who works in the legal arena, would you not want to be affiliated with the premier judiciary interpreting association in the country? In my discussions with dozens of federal interpreters, this argument has not proved very convincing.

Some interpreters have specific gripes with NAJIT: they question the allocation of resources that went into the development of NAJIT's Spanish interpretation exam, saying the federal exam already existed as a competent arbiter of quality. Some criticize NAJIT's failure to take a position on certain issues, or they question the positions it has adopted. Others say NAJIT has failed to obtain better working conditions (read: more money) for

HOW CITA BECAME NAJIT *continued*

Every one of these directors has worked hard to offer members what they need and want from their professional association. Each one deserves special recognition for their dedication to the profession's growth through the many activities NAJIT has sponsored, the training and education programs offered through the Society for the Study of Translation and Interpretation (SSTI) — another dream that came true under Mirta Vidal's leadership — and finally, the creation of our very own professional credential.

Some members have wanted NAJIT to function as a labor union. Fortunately, those who have volunteered their time and efforts to steer this organization into the future had a very clear vision. NAJIT is not a labor union, and has never attempted to move in that direction, one of the factors to which its success can be attributed. CITA, and now NAJIT, was created to fill a vacuum in an incipient profession. It was incipient back in 1979 and is now a well-established and respected integral part of the justice system in the United States. While there is still a lot of work that needs to be done, NAJIT has accomplished a lot more than any of us could have envisioned when it all started.

Happy anniversary, NAJIT! ▲

interpreters. Most of the unaffiliated federal Spanish interpreters I've spoken with say: "What do I get out of being a member? What can NAJIT do for me?"

Federal interpreters who work in major cities with established interpretation programs and staff interpreters usually have good working conditions. Most jurisdictions hire certified interpreters and employ teams for longer proceedings. However, for novice interpreters, or those who live in areas that traditionally have not hosted large concentrations of LEP persons, NAJIT is a professional life-line. With its position papers, workshops on interpreter protocol, and continuing education programs (note that federally certified interpreters do not have a continuing education requirement), NAJIT can truly be beneficial to interpreters in such situations.

I believe NAJIT has already been of service to federally certified interpreters. In recent years the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts has always sent a representative to NAJIT's annual conference, providing a unique opportunity for interpreters to interact directly with interpreter supervisory personnel from Washington. The Administrative Office has said on more than one occasion that it views NAJIT as a special interlocutor. NAJIT played a crucial role in conveying interpreter concerns regarding the (in)famous contract to Washington, and when the Administrative Office convened a meeting to discuss the contract, it specifically requested the presence of a federally certified NAJIT member.

I think NAJIT can be an effective voice for federally certified interpreters by acting as a clearinghouse for their concerns. A necessary first step is for us to obtain the list of all federally certified interpreters. In the past, the Administrative Office sent such a list to all interpreters. Now, despite repeated oral requests, it refuses to do so. Nothing can prevent us, however, from compiling the list ourselves. We could end up with a list that is actually more complete than that of the government.

The other day I had a request for a Spanish interpretation assignment in Las Vegas. I checked NAJIT's on-line directory, where no Spanish interpreters were listed. Maybe there are federally certified interpreters in Nevada. Why aren't they NAJIT members?

With an online list of all federally certified interpreters, NAJIT would be able to rapidly communicate with the federal Spanish interpreting community. NAJIT members would be in a better position to recommend federal interpreters for jobs in other states. Surely this is one of several ways we could attract more federally certified interpreters to increase NAJIT's ranks. ▲