

HONORING A DISTINGUISHED CAREER: A TRIBUTE TO JOHN R. STEGNER ON HIS RETIREMENT FROM THE IDAHO SUPREME COURT

HONORABLE CHIEF JUSTICE G. RICHARD BEVAN

It is with deep admiration and a sense of profound respect that I recognize the contributions of John R. Stegner to Idaho's legal system. John has dedicated over twenty-six years to Idaho's judiciary, the last five as a member of the Idaho Supreme Court. John's retirement marks the end of an illustrious career characterized by unwavering dedication, integrity, and resolute commitment to upholding the principles of law and justice.

Justice Stegner embarked on his journey in the legal profession as a law clerk for U.S. District Judge Harold L. Ryan. He then joined the Lewiston firm of Clements, Brown & McNichols and practiced law there for more than twelve years. His path was marked by a relentless pursuit of excellence, which ultimately led him to the district court bench in Moscow, Idaho in January 1997. He left that position in June 2018, when he was appointed Idaho's 57th Justice. His service as a judge or justice in Idaho has thus spanned more than twenty-six years. During his tenure, he has been known for his exceptional grasp of the law, his command of the courtroom, and for his willingness to seek solutions to society's problems that so often surface in courtrooms. He was instrumental in establishing Latah County's Drug Court (2002) and Mental Health Court (2012).¹ These courts became known for a time (they are now known as treatment courts) as problem solving courts, and that name reflects John Stegner's nature. He is relentless at striving to solve problems and make the legal system better.

One cannot overstate the significance of John's contributions to the judiciary. His tenure as a judge and as a Justice on the Idaho Supreme Court has been characterized by a steadfast commitment to the rule of law and a deep understanding of the legal complexities that define our society. His judicious decisions and well-reasoned opinions have set important precedents that will guide the legal profession in Idaho for years to come. He has also been, as described by one of his law clerks, a "voice crying in the wilderness" for his impassioned dissents which also have added to the body of Idaho's jurisprudence. I would not be surprised to see those dissents cited more often than any other justice's, given the depth of Justice Stegner's scholarship and the persuasiveness of his arguments.

Beyond his legal acumen, John has displayed a remarkable sense of empathy and compassion in his role. He recognized the human dimension of the cases that came before him, and his decisions were guided by a profound understanding of their impact on individuals and communities. This compassion, combined with his

1. Press Release, Idaho Governor C.L. "Butch" Otter, Judge John Stegner Appointed to Idaho Supreme Court (May 23, 2018), <https://isb.idaho.gov/blog/judge-john-stegner-appointed-to-idaho-supreme-court/>.

unwavering dedication to justice, earned him the respect and admiration of legal professionals and the broader community, as shown by his receipt of the George G. Granata Jr. Award for Judicial Excellence and the Idaho State Bar's Distinguished Jurist Award.

Throughout his career, John has mentored and guided countless aspiring judges, lawyers, law clerks, and interns—some of whom are now judges. Through them, whatever their station, he leaves a legacy of knowledge transfer and professional development.

The mark of a truly exceptional colleague lies in his or her ability to foster a positive and collaborative work environment. John has been that colleague—someone who could be relied upon for wisdom, support, and camaraderie. His tolerant nature and willingness to engage in open dialogue have created an atmosphere of mutual respect and understanding within the halls of the Supreme Court.

While we bid farewell to Justice Stegner as he embarks on new frontiers, we cannot help reflecting on the profound impact he has had on the Idaho Supreme Court and the legal community at large. His legacy is not just one of legal wisdom, but also one of integrity, empathy, and unwavering commitment to the principles of justice.

It is impossible to capture the essence of John's career and the impact he has had on the Idaho Supreme Court in a few paragraphs. All the same, I hope that this tribute serves as a testament to the immense respect and admiration we on the Idaho Supreme Court hold for him. Justice Stegner's contributions have been outstanding, and his presence will be deeply missed. His retirement is not just the closing of a chapter; it is the culmination of a remarkable story of service and dedication.

On behalf of my colleagues, I offer our heartfelt congratulations on his retirement and our sincerest thanks for his unwavering commitment to justice and the people of Idaho. We wish Justice Stegner all the best in this new chapter of his life. His legacy will endure, and his impact will be felt for generations to come.