

**IN MEMORIAM**



**C. CLIFTON “CLIFF” YOUNG**

# MEMORIAL

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## C. CLIFTON “CLIFF” YOUNG

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Supreme Court Justice C. Clifton “Cliff” Young passed away on April 4, 2016, at the age of 93. Justice Young had a long and distinguished career as a Nevada public servant. He was held in high esteem by his colleagues and was known for his graciousness, humility, and commitment to the rule of law.

Born in Lovelock, Nevada, in 1922, Justice Young grew up surrounded by his accomplished family and influenced by figures in the local community. His grandfather ran a hardware store and was responsible for establishing the first utility system in Lovelock. Both of Justice Young’s grandfathers dabbled in politics by serving in the Nevada Assembly; his paternal grandfather represented Humboldt County and his maternal grandfather represented Washoe County. His father served as Pershing County’s first recorder, and later became a justice of the peace. He practiced law into his eighties. Justice Young’s mother worked as a journalist for twenty-five years, submitting stories for publication in the *Nevada State Journal* and writing articles as a society editor for the *Lovelock Miner Review*. Together Young’s family encouraged his dreams and set the stage for his career of public service.

As a boy, Justice Young was influenced by the flamboyant Lovelock sheriff and assessor, C.H. Chapman. Chapman, who went by the nickname Chappie, engrossed Justice Young. As sheriff, Chappie was fearless and known to mete out justice swiftly and resolutely, shooting more than one criminal during his career. Described by Justice Young as a legend and local hero, Chappie was a revered cowboy, who was celebrated for his six-shooter, cowboy hat, and boots. Justice Young admired Chappie’s free spirit and eccentricity. As justice of the peace, Justice Young’s father worked closely with Chappie. While in high school, Justice Young, who enjoyed photography, was enlisted by his father and Chappie to document coroners’ inquests through photographs. The pictures were used in the coroner’s reports. Justice Young felt important working with Chappie, as he viewed him as a role model and mentor.

Justice Young’s mother encouraged him and his two older siblings to pursue higher education. This influenced his commitment to academics, and unsurprisingly, he graduated valedictorian of his

high school class. He went on to receive his undergraduate degree from the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR), where he was class valedictorian. Young was also the recipient of the Herz Gold Medal, presented at each UNR commencement ceremony to the graduating senior with the highest grade-point average. Upon graduating from college, Justice Young enlisted in the United States Army during World War II, where he served time in France, Austria, and Germany. He was awarded a Bronze Medal for his efforts during the war. After the war, he attended Harvard Law School and earned his juris doctorate in 1949. He returned to Reno where he began practicing estate planning law with a college friend who also went to law school. Not satisfied with working solely in law and because he was politically ambitious, it was not long before he began pursuing a political career.

In 1950, Justice Young was elected to his first political office—Washoe County Public Administrator. Two years later, at the age of 29, he was elected to the United States House of Representatives, where he served two terms. When his second term in Congress ended, he made a bid for the U.S. Senate but was defeated by incumbent Alan Bible, a well-established political figure in Nevada. Following his defeat, Justice Young returned to private practice, before being elected to the Nevada State Senate, where he served from 1966 to 1980.

By any measure, Justice Young's service to the people of Nevada was highlighted by his passion for the outdoors. He grew up enjoying hunting, fishing, and camping. Described by many as a conservationist, Justice Young devoted himself to protecting Nevada's public lands for all Nevadans. Beginning with efforts to create regional parks throughout the state, Justice Young was instrumental in establishing the state's park system in 1969. Closer to his home in northern Nevada, Justice Young helped establish county parks at Bowers Mansion, Davis Creek, and Washoe Lake, to name a few. He helped create and preserve the Truckee River bike path, which accommodates both bicycles and pedestrians, spanning from Reno to Sparks. Justice Young's oldest daughter LaVonne Young Duhon fondly recalled her father always saying, "Get the land. We've got to get the land. Once it's developed, you can't get it back." He worked tirelessly giving speeches and talking to people to get funding for the parks. In the early 1980s, Justice Young was a board member of the National Wildlife Federation, and later served as president.

While on the supreme court, Justice Young's chambers was a favorite for school children to tour. The chamber was full of animal trophies from his hunting excursions and fishing trips, reflecting his continued devotion to the outdoors. Those fortunate enough to attend a tour would see a zebra rug, a bison head, and a large blowfish, to name a few of the animals on display in his chamber. Also

adorning the walls was a collection of vintage rifles. His chambers reflected who he was.

In 1984, Justice Young was elected to the Nevada Supreme Court, where he served for 18 years. One of few justices to have served in the legislative branch—an experience that would prove useful to the numerous policy decisions that require resolution at the state's highest court—Justice Young routinely questioned how the court's decisions would affect all Nevadans. A judicial innovator who transformed and improved the efficiency of Nevada courts, Young was responsible for the supreme court's criminal fast track program and civil settlement conference program. Young devised the criminal fast track program in order to resolve certain criminal cases in which the defendant was represented by counsel and the legal issues were not novel. The length of the briefs was shortened, and the deadlines were made shorter so as to expedite each case's resolution. Young's continued efforts brought about the civil settlement program, a mandatory process for most civil cases in which the parties were represented by counsel. More than half of all cases referred to the program were successfully settled. These effective programs are still in place at the court today. Justice Young was also involved in organizing the central legal staff into teams that specialized in legal issues so as to help resolve cases expediently. Two examples of staff teams was the capital murder team and the criminal pro se team. In 1988, Congress named the federal courthouse in Reno after Young. And in 2011, he received the Supreme Court Legacy of Justice Award for his contributions, innovations, and enhancements to the Nevada justice system.

In addition to his legacy of public service, Justice Young was a devoted husband and father. In 1952, he married the former Loretta Jane Hempfling Gibson (Jane), and they had four children together: Florence LaVonne Young Duhon, Diana Jane Young Monfalcone, Clifton James Young, and Robert Alfred Young. The Youngs also raised Jane's son, Mark Craig Gibson, from a previous marriage. Justice Young had nine grandchildren and two great grandchildren. Jane was an artist and active member of the Reno community, attending clubs and church events. Jane predeceased Justice Young.

During his tenure at the court, Justice Young hung a number of Jane's paintings of animals in the supreme court's halls. He shared his love of life with those around him. Every summer he hosted a barbeque for court employees and their families on his property in Reno. There was a pond and plenty of room for children to run free and play. Justice Young wanted to give back to employees and let them know that he appreciated them.

Before serving on the supreme court, Justice Young joined the Reno law firm of Breen, Young, Whitehead, Belding & Hardesty, where he became a mentor to Justice James W. Hardesty. Reflecting

on their lengthy relationship, Justice Hardesty observed that “Justice Young achieved remarkable success in every phase of his professional career. He was an outstanding lawyer, a distinguished congressman for our state, an admittee to the Nevada Legislature’s Hall of Fame as a state senator, president of the National Wildlife Federation, and retired after 18 years of service to the Nevada Supreme Court as one of the court’s most innovative justices. But I believe Justice Young will be most remembered for his love and devotion to his family and his church; his common sense approach to life; his extraordinary intellect, humor, and wit; and his commitment to the conservation of the environment. He was, in short, a great man who mentored so many, including me.”

