

IN MEMORIAM

CHARLES EDWARD SPRINGER

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Supreme Court Justice Charles Edward Springer passed away on February 19, 2019, one day shy of his 91st birthday. Justice Springer served on the Nevada Supreme Court for 18 years, from 1981-1999, serving as chief justice twice. Considered quite an individualistic person, he was highly regarded as an expert in the field of juvenile law and viewed as a champion against gender bias and racial discrimination in the judiciary. Like his parents and grandparents before him, Justice Springer devoted much of his career to public service.

Justice Springer was a native Nevadan, born on February 20, 1928, in Reno to Edwin and Rose Kelly Springer. His father passed away during the Depression while Justice Springer was just an infant, but his mother, a native of Goldfield, Nevada, was employed for many years by the U.S. government. Working for different commanding generals in the U.S. Army, she traveled extensively until retiring as the executive secretary to the commanding officer of the Herlong Army Ordinance Depot. As a result, Justice Springer was partially raised by his grandparents, William A. and Mary Kelly, who likewise followed the path of public service. Before Justice Springer was born, his grandfather was appointed by the President to serve as the Western States Director of the Internal Revenue Service and was stationed in San Francisco, California. At the end of President Woodrow Wilson's term, his grandparents moved back to the Reno area, and his grandfather became the only bailiff for the Washoe County courthouse. Justice Springer often accompanied his grandfather to work, so he was introduced to the legal field as a young boy and soon became quite comfortable roaming the halls of justice.

Justice Springer attended Mount Rose Elementary School and Billingham Junior High School in Reno. He went on to attend St. Joseph's College, a Catholic seminary in Mountain View, California, where he found his true calling to help the poor, the underprivileged, and the discriminated against. After several years of studying at St. Joseph's, Justice Springer returned to Reno for his senior year at Reno High School, where he participated in football and track and won the title of state champion sprinter. After

graduating from Reno High at age 17, he enlisted in the U.S. Army, ultimately serving occupational forces in Japan as a paratrooper with the 11th Airborne Division.

Following his military service, Justice Springer enrolled at the University of Nevada, Reno, and joined the Lambda Chi Alpha fraternity. During his time at the university, he continued to shine in athletics, competing in track and joining the university's legendary football team in the late 1940s. He was one of the few athletes who qualified to become a member of Sigma Delta Psi, a national athletic fraternity whose members possess exceptional athletic abilities and are required to meet certain standards in track and field, including running events, the broad jump, the high jump, and javelin, as well as in swimming and gymnastics. Justice Springer graduated from the University of Nevada in 1950 with a Bachelor of Arts degree. After his graduation, Justice Springer received an ROTC commission as a second lieutenant in the U.S. Army Reserves.

While attending the university, he met Jacqueline Sirkegian, from White Pine County, who would later become his wife. They married on St. Patrick's Day in 1951. Soon after, the couple moved to Washington, D.C., where Justice Springer attended Georgetown University Law School. While attending Georgetown, he worked for Senator Pat McCarran, a Democrat, and Jacqueline worked for Senator George "Molly" Malone, a Republican, in offices right across the hall from one another in the Senate Office Building. Justice Springer graduated from Georgetown with his Bachelor of Laws degree in 1953, and he was admitted to practice law in Washington, D.C.

The couple returned to Reno soon thereafter, and Justice Springer was admitted to the Nevada Bar. He began his career as an associate with the law firm Drendel and Dixon. He then served as a law clerk to the only U.S. District Court Judge in Nevada at the time, Roger T. Foley, whose jurisdiction encompassed the entire state, requiring frequent travel between Reno and Las Vegas. At the end of his clerkship, Justice Springer and two of his best friends from youth, Howard McKissick, Jr., and Proctor Hug, Jr., formed the law firm Springer, McKissick, and Hug. Justice Springer helped to develop and teach the Nevada Bar Review course, worked as a legislative bill drafter for the Nevada Legislature, served as the City Attorney for Gabbs, Nevada, and served as Governor Grant Sawyer's legal advisor for several years. While in private practice, he did not hesitate to take on unpopular causes of the time, representing, for example, several victims of racial discrimination. In 1962, he was appointed by Governor Sawyer to serve a short stint as Attorney General of Nevada, during which he called for protecting air and water quality.

Justice Springer was also active in the Democratic Party, in which he served as the Washoe County and state chairman, as well as a

national committeeman. President John F. Kennedy appointed him to the National Small Business Administration, and in 1962, Justice Springer received an award as “Outstanding Young Democrat.”

In 1969, Justice Springer was asked by Washoe County District Judge Emile Gezelin to establish a juvenile court, and he set to work. Meanwhile, in 1970, after a tumultuous split from the Democratic Party, he ran for governor as an independent, liberal reformer and antiwar candidate. However, a lower court struck his name from the ballot, and the appellate court’s reinstatement of his candidacy came too late for him to run a successful campaign, thus losing the general election. From 1973-1980, Justice Springer served as the first Juvenile Court Master for the Second Judicial District Court of Washoe County. In 1979, he created the John Shaw Field Foundation, an organization that was dedicated to helping juveniles in need of assistance; he continued to serve as president of the Foundation for many years.

Justice Springer successfully ran for the Nevada Supreme Court in 1980 and took his seat on the court in 1981, serving three terms as a justice and twice as chief justice. After being elected to the supreme court, he attended the Graduate Program for American Judges at Oriel College, Oxford University in England, and he received a Master of Laws in Judicial Process from the University of Virginia. During his tenure on the bench, he advocated for the creation of an intermediate court of appeals, which was eventually approved by a vote of the people in 2014. An advocate for women’s rights, Justice Springer served on the Nevada Commission for Women. He headed a Nevada Supreme Court study on gender bias in the judiciary, and he piloted another study related to racial discrimination in Nevada’s judicial system as well. He was a well-respected justice of the supreme court, he was a mentor to his law clerks, and he wrote many important opinions that have shaped and guided the Nevada legal community.

In addition to his many contributions while on the bench, Justice Springer served on the faculty of several institutes of higher learning. He was an adjunct professor at the University of the Pacific, McGeorge School of Law, as well as at the University of Nevada, Reno; he instructed for the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges and the National Judicial College in Reno; and he occasionally taught abroad as a visiting professor at the University of International Business and Economics in Beijing, China, and at the Center for Basque Studies in San Sebastian, Spain. He also participated in moot courts at McGeorge, Pepperdine University in Malibu, California, and Southwestern University Law School in Los Angeles, California. Additionally, Justice Springer served on the University of Nevada, Reno, College of Education Advisory Board.

Justice Springer was a prolific writer, publishing scholarly articles on judicial issues as well as books, such as the following: *Justice for Juveniles*, U.S. Department of Justice, 1986; *Rehabilitating the Juvenile Court*, Notre Dame Journal of Law, Ethics & Public Policy, 1991; *Nevada Women's Legal Guide* (co-authored with Paula Quagliana), Nevada Commission for Women, 1995; and *Advisory to the American Law Institute on Principles of the Law of Family Dissolution: Analysis and Recommendations*, 2000. He also received many awards and accolades, including an "Outstanding Service Award" from the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, the "Civil Libertarian of the Year Award" from the Northern Nevada Chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union, special recognition from the Las Vegas chapter of the NAACP, "The UNR Midby-Byron Distinguished Leadership Award," an "Award for Outstanding Community Service" from the Washoe County Teacher's Association, and an award from *Who's Who in America* and *Who's Who in American Law*. Justice Springer was involved in many professional boards and civic organizations, including the Board of Directors of the Nevada Museum of Art in Reno, the Reno Chamber Orchestra, Prospectors' Club, Scholastic Honor Society of Phi Kappa Phi, president of the English Linguistic Group, chair of the Medical Malpractice Screening Panel, president of the National Association of Juvenile Court Judges, arbitrator for the American Arbitration Association, member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, American Legion, and fellow of the American Bar Association. Posthumously, Justice Springer was recognized by concurrent resolution of the Nevada State Legislature for his dedicated and highly distinguished public service.

Although somewhat of a maverick, Justice Springer was known for his courtesy and scholarship. He devoted his career not only to being a political activist and a champion of underserved and mistreated individuals, but also to sharing his knowledge by teaching and being a mentor to others. In addition to his wife Jacqueline, Justice Springer's family includes a daughter, Kelli Ann Campbell, her husband Richard G. Campbell, and three grandchildren: Charles Tyler Campbell, Kelsey Campbell-McCloud (Conner), and Karina Ann Campbell.

