

NEWS RELEASE

Arizona Supreme Court
Administrative Office of the Courts



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Arizona Judiciary Mourns Loss of Retired Chief Justice Frank X. Gordon, Jr.

PHOENIX – The Arizona Judicial Branch shares its condolences with the family of retired Arizona Supreme Court Chief Justice Frank X. Gordon, Jr. Former Justice Gordon passed away on January 6, three days before his 91st birthday. Justice Gordon is survived by his wife of nearly 70 years, Joan; by their children, Trey and Candy; three grandchildren; and 12 great-grandchildren. Justice Gordon was predeceased by a son, Scott Gordon, who died of a heart issue at the age of 19.

Justice Gordon was appointed to the Arizona Supreme Court by Governor Raul Castro in 1975, the first appellate court judge appointed under the merit selection system approved by Arizona’s voters. He was the first Mohave County lawyer to serve on the Arizona Supreme Court and the first Mohave County lawyer to serve as chief justice. He served as an associate justice from 1975 until 1987 and as chief justice from 1987 until his retirement in 1992. Justice Gordon was appointed to the Mohave County Superior Court bench in 1962 when he was 33 years old – the youngest judge in Arizona at the time – and served there until his appointment to the supreme court. Before his service as a judge, he was a partner with his father in the office of Gordon and Gordon in Kingman, Arizona from 1954 until 1962.

Justice Gordon’s service was iconic in Arizona’s legal landscape. In 1988, then-Chief Justice Gordon presided over the Arizona Senate’s impeachment trial of Arizona Governor Evan Mecham. The proceedings were filmed by Arizona State University’s public television station and Justice Gordon was admired throughout the state for his calm approach of letting the senators know they were the Court of Impeachment and he was there to preside and to make sure that the rules and procedures established were fair and impartial.

Also while chief justice in 1988, he established a multi-disciplinary Commission on the Courts “to develop a long-range plan for the judiciary through and beyond the year 2000.” The court reform effort moved forward nearly all the commission’s 50 recommendations in one form or another.

Justice Gordon was particularly proud of his efforts in education programs offered to adult and juvenile offenders. The “Learn Labs” program he promoted made education part of probation programs and in 1991, he was one of six people honored with special recognition by President George H.W. Bush at the White House.

On the passing of Justice Gordon, Arizona Supreme Court Chief Justice Robert Brutinel stated, “Justice Gordon was the embodiment of what it means to be a judge to a generation of Arizonans. He was a true gentleman who never forgot his small-town Arizona roots. The impact of his work

to modernize and improve Arizona's justice system shapes our courts today. We are grateful for his service to the citizens of Arizona and to our courts.”

Justice Gordon was born in Chicago, Illinois on January 9, 1929. At six months old, he and his mother moved to Kingman, Arizona, to join his father, an attorney, who had purchased a title company and became an insurance agent after practicing law in Chicago and before becoming licensed to practice in Arizona. Justice Gordon graduated from Mohave County Union High School and attended Stanford University the following year, befriending fellow Arizonan Sandra Day, who was later appointed to the United States Supreme Court as Sandra Day O'Connor. While at Stanford, Justice Gordon met and married his wife, Joan Gipe. After Justice Gordon earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1951, the couple moved to Tucson, Arizona where Justice Gordon attended law school at the University of Arizona.

After retiring from the Court, Justice Gordon joined the Phoenix firm of Roush, McCracken & Guerrero. In 1994, he was part of a two-lawyer team the U.S. State Department sent to the country of Belarus to meet with a committee of their Parliament, to evaluate their constitution, and to make suggestions that might change their country from a totalitarian socialist state to a democracy. In 2006, he joined the American Bar Association's People to People Ambassadors program, where he and Joan spent two weeks in China meeting with lawyers, judges, members of chambers of commerce, and embassy officials discussing the rule of law in China and progress being made. In 2016 he published an autobiography under the title, *From A Boy With A Horse To A Man With A Gavel: The Autobiography of Former Chief Justice Frank X. Gordon*.

Visitation will be held at First United Methodist Church located at 5510 N. Central Ave. in Phoenix on Monday, January 13, 2020 at 3 p.m., with memorial services following. Graveside services will be held on Friday, January 17 at Noon at Mountain View Cemetery in Kingman, Arizona.

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