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A Tribute to Peter S. Popovich

Abstract

A tribute to Peter S. Popovich, Chief Justice of the Minnesota Supreme Court 1989-1990 and William Mitchell College of Law alumni.

Keywords

Minnesotan, Chief Justice, William Mitchell

Disciplines

Judges | Jurisprudence

A TRIBUTE TO PETER S. POPOVICH

DEAN JAMES F. HOGG†

The *William Mitchell Law Review* has decided to dedicate this issue to Chief Justice Peter S. Popovich. I congratulate the members of the *Law Review* Board on this decision.

The year 1983 was one of great change for the court system in Minnesota. An intermediate appellate court, the Minnesota Court of Appeals, was created, providing a formidable new organizational and administrative challenge. Peter S. Popovich was named by Governor Rudy Perpich as the first Chief Judge of the Court of Appeals. In the four years he held that position Chief Judge Popovich produced and led an efficient, most hard-working, and respected court. From the beginning, the workload was beyond expectations and only a firm guiding hand kept the court within targeted timeliness for handling of cases. By all accounts, Chief Judge Popovich was a driver with a clear vision of where to go and how to get there. His pioneering efforts contributed greatly to the rapid acceptance and appreciation of the new court. His accomplishment in this organizational task has been recognized nationally and the Minnesota Court of Appeals is considered a national model of efficiency.

Peter Popovich's appointment as an Associate Justice to the Minnesota Supreme Court in 1987 was, in effect, a most appropriate recognition of his accomplishments in forming and building the Minnesota Court of Appeals. It was also, however, a recognition of his outstanding talents as a bright lawyer, a clear thinker, and most importantly, a fair judge. This recognition continued with his appointment in 1989 as Chief Justice of the Minnesota Supreme Court. Unfortunately, and only because of Minnesota legislation which has the practical effect of forcing judges to retire at age seventy, his term of office as Chief Justice was limited to two years. Chief Justice Popovich resigned in November 1990.

William Mitchell takes great pride in the fact that Chief Jus-

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tice Popovich is a graduate (St. Paul College of Law '47). He has been photographed on a number of occasions with other graduates who likewise have attained great honor on the bench—Warren E. Burger, Chief Justice of the United States, retired (St. Paul College of Law '31), and Douglas K. Amdahl, Chief Justice of Minnesota, retired (Minneapolis-Minnesota College of Law '51). He is one of the more than 160 judges sitting or retired, who have graduated from the College and who have gone on to careers on the bench. His dedication to public service is, and will continue to be, an inspiration to students.

Chief Justice Popovich was born in Crosby, Minnesota, on November 27, 1920. He was born of Yugoslavian parents, his father having immigrated to the United States at the age of fifteen. The Chief Justice's strong work ethic, his interest in family traditions, and his emphasis on education all derive from his background on the "the range."

Indeed, he is proud of the fact that he is the first lawyer from the Iron Range to sit on the Minnesota Supreme Court. His education began with Chisholm Elementary and High School, then an Associate in Arts Degree from Hibbing Junior College, and a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Minnesota in 1943. Eye problems kept him from service in the armed forces during World War II. In 1947, he graduated from the St. Paul College of Law with a Bachelor of Science in Law and a Bachelor of Laws degree. His early work experience included writing as a correspondent reporter for the *Range Times*, published in Virginia, Minnesota. He likes to speak of supporting himself through law school by selling candy and peanuts during class breaks, working as an insurance investigator, and serving a turn as an Arthur Murray dance instructor. His progress in the law, however, was clearly reflected by his appointment from 1945 to 1947 as law clerk to Judge John B. Sanborn of the United States Circuit Court of Appeals.

He began his legal career in 1947 by opening the law firm of Peterson and Popovich with a classmate. After dealing with the difficulties of starting a new practice, he ran for election to the Minnesota House of Representatives in 1950. Following this first unsuccessful attempt, he was elected in 1952 and served for ten years. During this period, he was recognized in a number of different ways as one of Minnesota's most outstanding legislators. Emphasizing his lifelong interest in edu-

cation, he served from 1955 to 1963 as Vice-Chairman of the Education Commission; from 1955 to 1957 as Vice-Chairman of the Appropriations Committee; from 1955 to 1961 as Chairman of the Education Subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee; and from 1955 to 1959 as Secretary of the Education Laws Committee. He also served as the Chairman of the Minnesota Statehood Centennial Commission from 1955 to 1959. He was named Outstanding Freshman Legislator in 1953, and most effective House member for both the 1959 and 1961 sessions. He was recognized as the individual who made the most significant contribution to the 1959 session.

Chief Justice Popovich worked just as hard and with the same remarkable success in his many civic and professional activities. He was named Outstanding Minnesotan by the Minnesota Broadcasters Association in 1983, and was the recipient of the Achievement Award from the Foundation for the Improvement of Justice, Inc.

We pay tribute to a great Minnesotan.

