



Thanks and Good-Bye

BY CHIEF JUSTICE NANCY E. RICE

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I want to use this final installment of Chief's Corner to talk about retirement (specifically mine) and the future of the Judicial Branch. First things first: I've decided to retire as of the end of June. I will have been on the Supreme Court for 20 years then (and a judge for 31 years, counting my time as a district court judge). That's long enough. It's time to give back my chair and let someone else have the job. However, as with many transitions, this is a time filled with mixed emotions.

My time on the bench has been amazing, to say the least. As a justice, I have had the opportunity to hear thousands of cases and write over 300 opinions, and I even remember a few of them. I couldn't have done this without a wonderful group of law clerks, many of whom are already becoming prominent members of our profession. Despite the sheer number of cases I have heard, I've made a conscious effort to never lose sight of what's at stake, the stress litigants feel while waiting for their case to be resolved, and the lives affected by our decisions. I'm sure there are plenty of litigants and attorneys who disagree with my decisions, but I never decided a case without deliberate thoughtfulness and thorough analysis and, I hope, this came across in my writing.

Reflecting on my career, I recognize that I am forever indebted to everyone who helped me get to this position. My time at the U.S. Attorney's Office was amazing and invaluable. It was there that I learned the importance of a strong team under the leadership of an inspirational leader, Bob Miller. Collectively we accomplished more, and taught each other more, than I imagined

possible. To this day, I have maintained strong relationships with everyone I worked with in that office.

My time on the district court bench was humbling and taught me how incredibly difficult it is to be a judge. With some mentoring and experience, I learned how to make difficult decisions quickly and comprehensively. As attorneys, we tend to overanalyze every decision and fret over the additional data we need to make a fully informed decision. That's simply not possible as a judge. The ability to make a decision in these circumstances is, I think, an important skill for every attorney and judge. When I'm asked about my favorite time on the bench, most of my best stories come from the trial bench, because, after all, stories about people tend to be funnier than "The Law."

Once on the Supreme Court, I quickly learned the importance of collegiality and collective responsibility in the Supreme Court's decision-making process. I have been fortunate to work with many great justices over the past 20 years, and Colorado is truly lucky to have universally high caliber justices.


As chief justice, I have enjoyed working with all the Supreme Court and working group committees that help the Judicial Branch function. There are so many people—judges, lawyers, and non-lawyers—who volunteer their time so that the Branch can operate efficiently. I have also enjoyed working with the chief judges of our 22 judicial districts and the chief judge of the Court of Appeals, who, through the Chief Judges' Council, have become essentially a strong Board of Directors to my position as CEO of the Judicial

Branch. Additionally, the Supreme Court could not function without its wonderful clerk's office, and the Judicial Branch could not function without the expertise and leadership of the State Court Administrator's Office, whose dedicated employees understand that their function is to support the nearly 400 judicial officers and 4,000 employees in any way possible. Finally, I have immensely enjoyed working with the judges and staff in every judicial district, who do an incredible job of interacting with the public and administering justice.

As for my future, I plan to stay involved in the legal community by teaching and through mediation and arbitration. Teaching has always been important to me. It has been my way of giving back to the legal community while serving in a position that severely restricts other, more traditional service to the community and legal profession. I've taught motions practice and advanced trial at both CU and DU for years, and have enjoyed teaching law students trial

skills. However, I now want to coach young or inexperienced attorneys on both trial and appellate skills. Having witnessed so many attorneys appear before me, I believe I have something unique to offer.

I also plan to spend a lot more time with my daughter and my travel-loving partner. I want to travel more frequently, and to more exotic places than Cortez (no offense Chief Judge Walker). But I also want to read, golf, and just do nothing. I don't plan to be a senior judge, which will allow me to be more involved on a personal level in community affairs.

As you are aware, the Supreme Court voted for Justice Coats to serve as the next chief justice. I have no doubt that Justice Coats will engage with the bar and the court system, ask good questions about how we operate as a branch and why, and look for ways for the courts to improve. And by the time this article is published, the governor will have most likely appointed a new justice. The Supreme Court and the Judicial Branch will continue to move forward and will continue to ensure our system of justice in Colorado remains robust and efficient. Thank you to all of the attorneys and judges who have joined me on this journey so far. I am truly humbled to have had so many wonderful opportunities in this profession. 

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