

DEATH OF MR. JUSTICE DOUGLAS

SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES

MONDAY, JANUARY 21, 1980

Present: MR. CHIEF JUSTICE BURGER, MR. JUSTICE BRENNAN, MR. JUSTICE STEWART, MR. JUSTICE WHITE, MR. JUSTICE MARSHALL, MR. JUSTICE BLACKMUN, MR. JUSTICE REHNQUIST, and MR. JUSTICE STEVENS.

THE CHIEF JUSTICE said:

It is my sad duty to announce that our friend and colleague William O. Douglas died Saturday, January 19, 1980.

For five years, since he suffered a severe stroke on New Year's Eve of 1974, Justice Douglas' courage and determination exemplified a quality that characterized his entire life. All of us who knew him well, and thousands who had no personal acquaintance with him, shared an admiration for his brave struggle to regain health and strength.

His retirement in November 1975 came after the longest tenure in the history of this Court. When he achieved this record in October 1973, we took note from this Bench of his extraordinary career, his devotion to freedom, his concern for our environment, his involvement in countless causes relating to the improvement of the human condition.

Justice Douglas' public and judicial career spanned more than four decades of massive social, political and economic changes in our country, and upheavals in the established order all over the world. Those changes had large impact on the kinds of issues coming before this Court. His mark on this crucial period in our history is a very significant one. His judicial opinions appear in nearly one fourth of the more than 440 volumes of the United States Reports.

I last saw Justice Douglas within the hour before he returned to the hospital and at that time I could see no lessening of that firm, even fierce, determination he showed in every contest in his life. He fought to the very end as he had always done.

We mourn his passing but we will not forget the comradeship and friendship that overshadowed the inescapable differences on the vexing issues that historically confront this Court.

In due course a memorial service of the Bar will be held in this Chamber to more fully pay our respects, and those of the Supreme Court Bar, to Mr. Justice Douglas.