

## RETIREMENT OF JUSTICE BLACKMUN

SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES

THURSDAY, JUNE 30, 1994

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Present: CHIEF JUSTICE REHNQUIST, JUSTICE BLACKMUN,  
JUSTICE STEVENS, JUSTICE SCALIA, JUSTICE KENNEDY,  
JUSTICE SOUTER, JUSTICE THOMAS, and JUSTICE GINSBURG.

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THE CHIEF JUSTICE said:

And we must also note with sadness that this is the last session in which our friend and colleague Harry Blackmun will be with us, and on this occasion we have sent Justice Blackmun the following letter which I will now read:

SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES,  
CHAMBERS OF THE CHIEF JUSTICE,  
*Washington, D. C., June 21, 1994.*

Dear Harry,

Your colleagues are sad that you have chosen to retire from the Court. You came here twenty-four years ago—longer ago than any of us—and have served with no less than sixteen different members.

Your opinions have covered a wide range of the issues that come before the Court. You are undoubtedly best known for having authored the Court's opinion in *Roe v. Wade* in 1973, but that distinction should not obscure the many other important issues on which you have spoken for the Court. Your contributions have not been limited to signed opinions, but include as well your wise counsel in our Conference.

And, though it has nothing to do with our judicial work, you have made a major improvement in the cultural life of the Court with your sponsorship of our biennial musical performances.

We shall miss you—especially if you go through with your present plans to move to Florida. But whether in Washington or Jacksonville, we wish you the very best.

Sincerely,

WILLIAM H. REHNQUIST  
JOHN PAUL STEVENS  
SANDRA DAY O'CONNOR  
ANTONIN SCALIA  
ANTHONY M. KENNEDY  
DAVID H. SOUTER  
CLARENCE THOMAS  
RUTH BADER GINSBURG

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JUSTICE BLACKMUN said:

I suppose I should read my response to the cordial letter that has just been written and here it is:

SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES,  
CHAMBERS OF JUSTICE HARRY A. BLACKMUN,  
*Washington, D. C., June 22, 1994.*

My Dear Colleagues:

Your cordial letter brightens my day.

It has been a privilege for me to have been on the Federal Bench for over three decades and on this Court for over two. I have sat now with 17 Justices of the Court, about 15% of all those who have served since 1790. And I have had the privilege of knowing eight others whose service was complete before I arrived here. You and the ones before you who have departed since 1970 have provided pleasant friendship, professional inspiration, imagination, instruction, and a sense of worthwhile service in a common devotion to our imperfect but beloved country. At times, our task has been

heavy, the hours long, and the stress substantial. Byron reminded us that ‘the Court is a very small organization for the weight it carries.’ But always there was an awareness that we were all in this together, and that the system seemed to be working. And there was the conviction that this was the way it was meant to be and that it would work out all right. What a comfort that has been, and what a comfort it has been to work with each of you and with others of our predecessors who have deliberated around our conference table.

As an old canoeist myself, I share Bill Douglas’ vivid and eloquent description of our work together, the occasional long and strenuous portages, and the last night’s and the last morning’s campfires, as he set it forth in his retirement letter of November 14, 1975. 423 U. S. IX. It is so true that the Justices of the Court are ‘strangers at the beginning but almost invariably are close friends at the end.’ So it was for him. So it was for me. And so it has been, I think, for each of us. We have been gathered from different places and through the influence of different forces. That is one of the remarkable aspects of this Court and of the experience of service upon it.

Let us hope that, in the years far down the line, when history eventually places us in such perspective as we deserve, it at least will be able to say: ‘They did their best and did acceptably well.’ If that comes to be said, it is because of your cooperation, your understanding, your patience, and your acknowledgment that ours is a common, not an individual, task, and that we strove, in our small ways and with our limited capabilities, for the righting of injustices of both ancient and current origins. For all this, I am grateful.

Sincerely,  
HARRY