

Court will bid farewell to a towering figure in our State's judiciary, Justice Bill Cunningham. A Lyon County native, Bill announced he would retire from the high court at the beginning of next month, bringing to a close a career of public service that has spanned more than half of his life. I would like to take a moment to join his colleagues, his family, and his community in western Kentucky in congratulating Bill on this remarkable milestone and to thank him for his service to the Commonwealth.

Bill first answered the call to service early in his life. Once he graduated from Murray State University and the University of Kentucky College of Law, Bill enlisted in the Army, nobly serving our Nation in uniform in Vietnam, Korea, and Germany. Upon his return to Kentucky, Bill decided to put his legal education to work for the men and women of his community. For the last 45 years, he has done just that.

Working in various courtrooms as the Eddyville City attorney, public defender for the Kentucky State Penitentiary, and the 56th judicial district's Commonwealth's attorney, Bill earned the esteem of his colleagues. In fact, his peers voted him the "Outstanding Commonwealth's Attorney for Kentucky."

Beginning in 1991, Bill moved to the other side of the bench when he was first elected as a circuit court judge in western Kentucky, serving in Caldwell, Livingston, Lyon, and Trigg Counties. He was then elected to the Kentucky Supreme Court in 2006. On the high court, Bill represents 24 counties in western Kentucky. His constituents rewarded Bill's accomplished service by reelecting him to a second term in 2014.

In addition to his dedicated leadership in our Commonwealth's legal system, Bill has written six books on Kentucky history and is a frequent contributor to local newspapers. He is also known as a captivating speaker, and I hope he will continue to share his perspective with audiences even in retirement.

As Bill's tenure on the Kentucky Supreme Court comes to a close, I would like to express my sincere gratitude for his lifetime of service to his community, our Commonwealth, and our country. In retirement, Bill said he looks forward to spending more time with his wife Paula, their five children, and their 15 grandchildren. I extend my best wishes to the entire Cunningham family, and I ask my Senate colleagues to help me congratulate Justice Bill Cunningham for his service to Kentucky.

Mr. President, the Paducah Sun recently published a column congratulating Bill on his retirement. I ask unanimous consent that the article be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From the Paducah Sun, Dec. 30, 2018]

JUSTICE SERVED

(By Joshua Robert)

Often loquacious and poignant, Kentucky Supreme Court Justice Bill Cunningham struggled Thursday to find the right words summarizing the coming sunset to his career, emotion seeping through his typically laid-back demeanor.

"I'm just very grateful—I'm trying to say this without getting choked up here—to the Almighty for giving me the strength to (serve the public)," the justice told a Sun reporter. "I'm so grateful for the people of west Kentucky for giving me this wonderful opportunity."

That Cunningham, a state Supreme Court justice for 12 years, paired his deity with the residents of his native and beloved western Kentucky is not surprising, nor is the affection one-way.

The judge, folksy and often dressed in his trademark seersucker suit, cuts a popular figure. An accomplished jurist, engaging orator and celebrated author, Cunningham is as Kentucky as they come, though in our opinion, uncommon in the commonwealth.

Cunningham, 74, of Kuttawa, announced Thursday that he'll be leaving the Supreme Court on Feb. 1, ending a career in public service that's spanned more than half his life. He considered his exit from the high court for more than a year and was unsettled by the prospect of leaving halfway through his second term.

But the "constant bombardment of human woe and suffering" he's seen and heard from the bench proved too much to continue. The judge, who felt compelled by duty, did what good judges are supposed to—he cast aside personal feelings to make the wisest decision possible, his self-assessment unsparing that he's not at his best.

"You've got to be emotionally strong to continue," Cunningham said, "and I'm just worn out with it."

The judge said he doesn't know what he'll do next, but it'll be something of service to the people of western Kentucky.

"I'm going to stay engaged," he said. "I'm going to take a couple of months off to get my perspective, then I'm going to do what other people do when they're out of a job—I'm going to look for one."

"I'd like to be able to serve in some capacity. I just don't know what that is right now."

Running again for public office, like for a state legislative seat, is unlikely. "I'm a dinosaur, and much of the political mainstream today has passed me by," he said in his self-effacing manner.

We've gotten to know Cunningham over the years, covering the justice's speeches and appearances and publishing his thoughtful, well-written guest opinion pieces from time to time. If we're coming off as an admirer, it's because we are, unapologetically so.

We've found Justice Cunningham has admirable traits like modesty, kindness, intelligence, fairness and loyalty, rare virtues among today's public servants. His replacement will come from one of the 24 counties within the First Supreme Court District, but in truth, it'll be impossible to replace Cunningham and all he has meant to our communities.

"There's some great timber out there, so they'll probably get a better justice than what they have now," he said of the judicial nominating process. With respect to the judge, that's a dubious claim.

Cunningham is slated to be the guest speaker Feb. 5 during a Paducah Lions Club meeting at Walker Hall.

"I'll be a former judge by then, so that's if they don't cancel the invitation," he joked.

We have no doubt the invitation's still good and his speech will be captivating, as always. After all, jobs and titles may change, but character doesn't.

TRIBUTE TO DEAN JOHNSON

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, last month marked the end of a distinguished career for Laurel County clerk Dean Johnson. Dean recently retired after 37 years of public service to his community, our Commonwealth, and this country. Today I would like to take a moment to reflect on my friend's many contributions to Laurel County and to thank him for his dedication to Kentucky.

First drawn to public service at a young age through organizations like the Key Club and the Future Farmers of America, Dean spent his career focused on integrity and efficiency. After serving in the Armed Forces and for 4 years as the county's treasurer, Dean was elected Laurel County clerk in 1985. His leadership has brought substantial innovation and development to this eastern Kentucky community.

In my State, a county clerk is responsible for providing a broad range of services to Kentuckians, including everything from voter registration and election management to licensing and recordkeeping. During Dean's tenure, the Laurel County clerk's office introduced new infrastructure and implemented new procedures to better serve a growing population. Running an election has changed quite a bit in Laurel County since Dean entered office, but his dedication has helped promote access to the ballot box for more than 44,000 registered voters.

In addition to his work in Laurel County, Dean collaborated with his peers to share best practices in the Kentucky County Clerks' Association. Earning both their trust and respect, he served a term as the organization's president, helping deliver essential services across Kentucky. Like other county clerks, Dean supported his fellow veterans by repurposing license plates into birdhouses. The products are sold with proceeds benefiting our Commonwealth's veterans.

Over the years, I have enjoyed working with Dean on behalf of our constituents, and I am proud to salute this man of great accomplishment. In his retirement, Dean plans to do more of what he loves most: spending time with his daughter, Teresa, and his granddaughter, Rebecca. He will also continue to oversee his 175-acre cattle farm. As he begins this next chapter, I would like to wish him the very best, and I ask my Senate colleagues to join me in thanking Laurel County clerk Dean Johnson for his decades-long service of our State.

Mr. President, the Sentinel-Echo in London recently published a profile of Dean's accomplished career. I ask unanimous consent that the article be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From the Sentinel-Echo, Dec. 26, 2018]

JOHNSON REFLECTS ON 37 YEARS OF SERVICE
(By Nita Johnson)

Society has changed drastically in the last 30 years—with technology being one of the major advancements.

As Laurel County Clerk Dean Johnson fills his final days in the position he has held for 33 years, he credits technology as the most advantageous developments for his office operations.

When Johnson took office as clerk in 1986, he came from a four-year term as county treasurer. In both offices, most paperwork was done on typewriters—a business machine that is now nearly obsolete. But when the technology craze hit full force, the first aspect of the clerk's office was to have computerized vehicle tag registrations.

Another huge change came in the voter registration processes—due to technological advancements and the growth in population over the years.

“When I came in, there were only 26 precincts,” Johnson said. “We had those big voting machines that were the size of a refrigerator.”

Within a couple of years, however, the use of Microvote was created—the small blue “suitcase” style machine used to cast votes. “We’ve moved to the self contained machines now because of the ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) because all the machines have to be compliant with that,” he said. “The other machines were hard for people to use if they were in a wheelchair. With that, we had to relocate some of the precincts because some didn’t have handicapped access.”

Laurel County now boasts 45 precincts, all ADA compliant.

While Johnson said he hasn’t seen a huge increase in voter registration or turnout, he said the division from 26 precincts in the mid-1980s to the current 45 precincts does reflect on the county’s increased population.

“The precincts divisions are done by the population in the areas, not the number of registered voters in an area,” he explained. “And the population is always determined by the latest Census.”

He feels that the Laurel County Clerk’s office has always maintained a high level of integrity and efficiency dealing with the public for motor vehicle registrations, transfers, voter registration and election procedures, and maintaining the massive load of deeds, mortgages, and other legal documents that fall under the scope of that office. And Laurel County has excelled in being some of the first counties in the state to utilize technology to better serve the public.

“We were among the first counties in the state to create a computerized absentee ballot form. I worked with a guy to simulate the state forms,” he said. “Right now we have 44,000 registered voters in the county.”

The clerk’s office was also one of the first offices in the county to receive and use a FAX machine, he said, adding that the Laurel County Public Library was one of the first to offer the FAX service.

The growth in the county’s population over the past 30 years has massively increased the work load for those who serve in that office.

“When I came here in 1986, it was the 160th year of Laurel County being established,” Johnson added. “There were fewer than 200 mortgage books. Now we have approximately 1,200.”

While the workload of the deputy clerks in the office has increased to huge proportions over the past three decades, Johnson said the application of technological advancements has not caused a large increase in the employees needed in his office.

“When I started, there were 10 employees and now we have 18, so we haven’t had a big increase in the employees because of the computer systems,” he explained. “This office has come from a gross intake of \$8 million to \$15.5 million and we’ve never had a non-compliant comment in the 37 years I’ve worked for the county.”

Being the Laurel County Clerk required Johnson to interact with other clerks across the state over the years—some associations for which he said will remain dear to his heart.

“I built a rapport with other clerks and I was active in the Kentucky County Clerks’ Association,” he said. “I served one term as president.”

He has many other accomplishments for which he is proud—one of which is the efficiency of tabulating the votes on election night. With that process, the election officers returning their precincts totals are met at the back entrance of the Laurel County Courthouse and their equipment unloaded by persons approved by the local election commission members. The officers then carry in the case containing the printouts of the votes and sign in for their particular precinct, which are processed in the lobby in the ground floor near the Broad Street entrance. The printouts are then taken to the clerk’s office on the second floor where the employees of the clerk’s office then separate the documents and record the votes. Although the polls close at 6 p.m., most precincts have submitted their results and the final count is completed and reported by 7:30 p.m.

“I’m very proud of the efficiency we have on election night,” Johnson said. “That goes to the employees in this office and the state associations of elections for the efficient way we process the votes and the accuracy we have.”

As an example, Johnson reflected on the 2016 Gubernatorial race in which Republican candidate James Comer lost to now Governor Matt Bevin by a mere 83 votes.

“We had to do a re-canvas,” Johnson said. “That (statewide) re-canvas was completed on Thursday, with the result coming out the same, of course. We aren’t like Florida and Georgia, that took weeks to do a re-canvas. In fact, in national elections, Kentucky is nearly always the first to report their results.”

Johnson has also served as chair of the Laurel County Republican party, stepping down this year after four years in that position. He also has been involved with KACo (Kentucky Association of Counties) for 12 years, is a veteran, is a Shriner and member of the local masonic lodges.

His interest in being a public servant came early in his teens, being a President of his school’s Key Club and FFA (Future Farmers of America). He learned early on about working hard, and said he always had a drawing toward political issues.

“As a kid I liked to be active in things and I always liked being involved in politics,” he said. “There were two people in politics that I always admired—Boyd Boggs who was a county judge executive and later the sheriff, and Dwight Eisenhower. Those two had given a lot and I wanted to be able to help people. As the clerk, you are in the position to help people and I’ve tried to do that, not just with questions about elections or vehicle registered. Other people just come in and ask about different things and I always tried to help them the best I could. I leave here with a good feeling because I think I’ve done that.”

His political interests also brought him another accomplishment for which he is very proud.

“I was the Laurel County campaign chair and we brought George H.W. Bush to the

Bush community,” he said. “I was also the chair when George W. Bush and (former Governor) Ernie Fletcher came here.”

In fact, the shelves that line a section of Johnson’s office have a picture of the late president, George H.W. Bush, with Johnson when Bush visited the Bush Fire Department. Johnson laughs when looking at the picture now, saying, “My hair was a different color then.”

Johnson is also proud of his home county and of the many advancements that have come to the residents of this community.

“This county has been aggressive in growing and using its natural resources,” he said. “We’ve had good leadership and that continues on today. I hope we keep on and keep our best and brightest here and supply them with jobs so they can make a decent living and stay here.”

Johnson is also very dedicated in his church, Calvary Baptist, where he has served as the adult Sunday School teacher for several years. He stands true to his beliefs—even when that belief is not the most popular or “progressive.”

But his greatest accomplishment—and joy—comes from his daughter, Teresa, and his only grandchild, Rebecca. He looks forward to spending more time with them and his son-in-law while he continues to oversee the 175-acre farm where he raises cattle.

“I’m retiring as of December 31,” he said. “I’m going to go home and relax.”

S. 1

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. Mr. President today I rise in opposition to S. 1. We should be working to reopen the Federal Government, not voting to infringe upon Americans’ First Amendment rights.

S. 1 is a package of four bills that were introduced during the last Congress. Three of the bills concern U.S. aid to Israel and Jordan, as well as sanctions against the Assad regime. They are noncontroversial, and I support them.

Unfortunately, the fourth bill, which is entitled the “Combatting BDS Act of 2019,” is so controversial that I am compelled to vote against the entire package before us tonight.

This Israel boycott legislation would encourage States and localities to restrict First Amendment protections for millions of Americans. It would do so by tacitly endorsing State actions to cut financial ties and terminate any government contract with anyone who engages in or supports boycotts of Israel.

My grandfather arrived in the United States as a stowaway fleeing the Polish pogroms, and my grandmother’s family fled Russia during the revolution.

As a young child during World War II, I came to view Israel as a symbol that never again will there be another Holocaust. My support for Israel isn’t about politics. It is about Israel’s right to exist.

I will always support a free and democratic Israel as the homeland of the Jewish people. That is why I have always voted to provide Israel the security assistance it needs.

However, my unwavering support for Israel does not override my support for Americans’ constitutional rights.