

Good morning. Today I am announcing the appointment of two Associate Justices to the Minnesota Supreme Court.

It did not take me long as Governor to recognize the significance and long-lasting legacy governors leave in the appointment of judges. The year after I leave office, the legislature can undo the initiatives I implemented. Policy-makers in the state agencies that I oversee can take the state in a different direction.

But the judges I appoint to the various courts in Minnesota will continue to serve the citizens of the state long after I leave the governor's office. Since the judges I appoint will be on the bench for many years to come, I take my role in the appointment of judges very seriously.

For the people who appear before these judges, their case is the most important thing in their life at that moment. For that reason, I try to appoint people to the bench who will listen and be respectful.

For the lawyers who try the cases before these judges, I try to appoint judges who will be consistent, fair and timely in their rulings.¹

In order to preserve and build confidence in our judicial system, I try to appoint judges who are first and foremost good citizens and understand that, while there is a respect for the office, respect for the person wearing the robe is achieved by how the person conducts him or herself.

Since taking office, I have personally interviewed hundreds of candidates for over 60 judgeships. These candidates have had to go through a rigorous selection process before they get to my office.

Although there is no requirement that applicants for the Court of Appeals or Supreme Court go before a judicial merit commission, this process has worked well at the district court level and has provided me with top caliber candidates. I have used a similar process for the Court of Appeals and now for the Supreme Court.

Appointments to the Supreme Court are the pinnacle of a governor's selections to the judicial branch. It is a duty that I take especially seriously. The Supreme Court is not only the final judicial authority in the state but also charts the direction that the entire court system will follow.

Supreme Court Justices must be intelligent, thoughtful, ethical and have a solid legal background. But in addition, they must make a positive impact on the judicial system through leadership.

Our Supreme Court in Minnesota is composed of these types of people. Two of them are leaving. Justice Edward Stringer and Justice Joan Ericksen Lancaster have both made tremendous contributions to the legal field and the community during their tenure on the high court. I want to thank them both for their service.

Justice Stringer, best wishes in your next endeavor.

Justice Lancaster, keep up the great work as you move to the federal bench.

When I learned that Justices Stringer and Lancaster were leaving the state Supreme Court, I asked eight exceptional people to review risumis and make recommendations to me. These people are:

George Soule, who chaired the committee,
Hennepin County Chief Public Defender Leonardo Castro,
Alan Eidsness,
Retired Chief Justice A. M. Sandy Keith,
Richard Pemberton,
Former Congressman Tim Penny,
Barbara Runchey, and
Jan Symchych

The committee reviewed 74 risumis and invited 16 candidates for an interview and after lengthy deliberation forwarded five finalists to me. This committee did a great job in a short time. I'm also sure they had many people giving them advice every step of the way. Thank you for your work.

The committee recommended five finalists to me:

Judge G. Barry Anderson,
Annamarie Daley,
Judge Sam Hanson,
Judge Harriet Lansing, and
Helen Meyer.

I interviewed the finalists on Tuesday and found them all to be first-rate candidates. I am confident that any one of them could join the Supreme Court and do an excellent job. But I was only able to pick two of them.

The first appointment I am making today is Judge Sam Hanson. I appointed Judge Hanson to the Minnesota Court of Appeals in October 2000. He had been a lawyer with the law firm of Briggs and Morgan in Minneapolis for 34 years prior to going to the Court of Appeals and had an extensive background in business and commercial litigation as an attorney. Judge Hanson is universally respected and brings an entrepreneurial background to the court.

It is only fitting that I make these announcements in this rotunda that is surrounded by numerous pillars. Judge Hanson is a pillar of integrity and vision.

As a Judge of the Court of Appeals, he has distinguished himself as a person who writes his opinions clearly and concisely yet with a full analysis of the issues.

Earlier I talked about the legacy of a governor's judicial appointments. Judge Hanson's legacy on the Supreme Court will be immediate, and it will be felt for many years to come.

Ladies and Gentlemen, members of the bench, Judge Sam Hanson.

The second appointment I am making today is Helen Meyer. Helen has 20 years of experience as a lawyer in private practice and is a civil trial attorney. Helen has taken risks in her career. She built her own law firm. She has served on law-related committees and has tackled tough and sometimes unpopular issues in her profession and worked to see them through.

Helen is also a pillar of strength. In addition, I know she will work well with the other justices on the Supreme Court.

Helen also relates well to the common person. Her clients come from a variety of backgrounds, education levels and professions. In writing her opinions, Helen will make sure they make sense to everyone.

Ladies and Gentlemen, members of the bench, Helen Meyer.

Since one of my appointees to the Supreme Court is currently a Court of Appeals Judge, there will be a vacancy on the Minnesota Court of Appeals. A month ago, I filled a vacancy on the Court of Appeals with the appointment of Natalie Hudson. At her announcement I said it was the toughest decision I had to make because all four finalists were so good.

To fill Judge Hanson's seat on the Court of Appeals, I am appointing Judge Wilhelmina "Mimi" Wright.

I appointed Judge Wright to the Second Judicial District bench in Ramsey County in September 2000. Prior to going to the bench, she was an assistant U.S. Attorney in Minneapolis where she prosecuted federal criminal cases. Before that, she was an attorney with the Hogan and Hartson law firm in Washington, D.C.

When I appointed Judge Wright to the Ramsey County bench, I described her as a rising star. At that time I didn't know how quickly that star would rise. In less than two years Judge Wright has distinguished herself as a hard-working judge who treats people fairly and with respect. She will bring her intellect, work ethic and sense of fairness to the Court of Appeals.

Ladies and Gentlemen, members of the bench, Judge Wilhelmina "Mimi" Wright.

I want to thank the Justices of the Supreme Court, Judges of the Court of Appeals and the large group of citizens who came to these announcements today.



Are there any questions from the media?