

Texas Supreme Court advisory 9.03.13: Chief Justice Jefferson resignation

TEXAS SUPREME COURT ADVISORY

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CHIEF JUSTICE JEFFERSON ANNOUNCES HIS RESIGNATION



Chief Justice Wallace B. Jefferson announced Tuesday that he will leave the Supreme Court of Texas effective October 1, 2013.

Chief Justice Jefferson has not determined his plans upon retirement.

Under his leadership, the Court drastically reduced the number of cases carried over from one term to another and significantly increased the use of technology to improve efficiency, increase transparency and decrease costs.

“I was fortunate to have served under Chief Justice Thomas R. Phillips, who in his nearly 17 years transformed the Court into a leader not only in jurisprudence, but also in the hard work of administering justice fairly,” Jefferson said. “I am most proud to have worked with my colleagues to increase the public’s access to the legal system, which guarantees the rights conferred by our Constitutions.”

Under his leadership cameras came to the Court in 2007, allowing the public to view oral arguments live to bolster the public’s understanding of the Court’s work. The Court implemented a new case-management system and required all lawyers to submit appellate briefs electronically for posting on the Court’s website so that the arguments framing the great issues of the day are accessible to Texas citizens.

The Court mandated electronic filing of court documents last year, which will decrease the cost of litigation and increase courts’ productivity. The Court fought for increased funding for basic civil legal services and established the Permanent Judicial Commission for Children, Youth, and Families. Jefferson led efforts to preserve historic court documents throughout the state and helped to reform antiquated juvenile-justice practices.

Appointed by Governor Rick Perry, Jefferson joined the Court in 2001. Before his appointment, he practiced appellate law with Crofts, Callaway & Jefferson in San Antonio, where he successfully argued two cases before the U.S. Supreme Court. Governor Perry elevated him to chief justice in September 2004 after Phillips’ retirement. He is Texas’ 26th chief justice.

During his tenure on the Court, he served with 21 different justices.

“Chief Justice Jefferson has been an extraordinary and effective leader for the Supreme Court and the Texas judiciary,” said Nathan L. Hecht, the Court’s senior justice. “The people of Texas are greatly indebted to him for his years of exemplary service.”

Beyond his work in Texas, Jefferson served as president of the Conference of Chief Justices, an association of chief justices from the 50 states and U.S. territories. He also served on the federal Judicial Conference Committee on Rules of Practice and Procedure, the Council of the American Law Institute, the Board of the American Bar Foundation and the Board of Advisors of the Justice Sandra Day O’Connor Judicial Selection Initiative. He holds honorary degrees from Michigan State University, University of New Hampshire School of Law, Hofstra Law School and Pepperdine University and is the namesake for the Wallace B. Jefferson Middle School in San Antonio.

“I owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to Governor Perry, who entrusted me with the awesome responsibility of leading the judicial branch in Texas,” Jefferson said. “The courts exist to serve the people. I am profoundly grateful that through three elections they have afforded me the opportunity of a lifetime – to devote so much of my life to their cause.”

