



Supreme Court Brochure

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Oklahoma Supreme Court Justices 2011



Standing (Left to Right): [Douglas L. Combs](#) Justice [James E. Edmondson](#), Justice [John F. Reif](#), Justice [Noma Gurich](#);

Sitting (Left to Right): [Justice Joseph M. Watt](#), [Vice-Chief Justice Tom Colbert](#), [Chief Justice Steven W. Taylor](#), [Justice Yvonne Kauger](#), [Justice James R. Winchester](#)



PHOTO BY DICK REED AND STU OSTLER

"The courts of justice of the State shall be open to every person, and speedy and certain remedy afforded for every wrong and for every injury to person, property, or reputation; and right and justice shall be administered without sale, denial, delay, or prejudice."

Okla. Const. Art. 2, §6.



The Supreme Court

The Courtroom, housed in the State Capitol, belongs to the people of Oklahoma, as do all courtrooms in this State. All sessions conducted in the Courtroom are open to the public. Citizens are welcome, and they are urged to attend these sessions. The Supreme Court Courtroom is the most beautiful room in the State Capitol Building. Along the walls of the courtroom are the portraits of the first five Supreme Court Justices --- Honorable R.L. Williams, Honorable Matthew Kane, Honorable Jesse J. Dunn, Honorable John B. Turner, and Honorable Samuel W. Hayes. The pictures of the current members of the Court are placed on the walls immediately outside the Courtroom doors. The first five Justices initially presided over all civil and criminal cases, but as the population began to grow and the court docket lengthened, it became clear that a five-judge court would not be able to handle all the cases. Four other Justices were appointed in 1917. In 1918, the Court of Criminal Appeals was created and three judges were appointed to preside over all criminal matters. (The Court of Criminal Appeals now consists of five judges.)

Solid mahogany found throughout the room was imported from the West Indies in 1918. Four large pillars of Vermont marble, weighing two tons each, support the ceiling. The ceiling is one of the most beautiful aspects of the Courtroom. Each intricate square reminds the viewer of an elaborate wedding cake. The ten solid brass light fixtures illuminating the Courtroom were designed in New York City in 1970. At the north end of the Courtroom beneath the ceiling, a piece of Vermont marble bears the inscription: "The safety of the State is the highest law" --- written by Justinian. Vermont marble is also found beneath the ceiling at the south end of the Courtroom. It carries the inscription: "The foundations of justice are that no man shall suffer wrong" --- a quotation from Cicero.



The Oklahoma Appellate Courts

Unlike most states, Oklahoma has two courts of last resort. The Supreme Court determines all issues of a civil nature, and the Oklahoma Court of Criminal Appeals decides all criminal matters. Members of these courts, and of the Court of Civil Appeals, are appointed by the governor from a list of three names submitted by the Oklahoma Judicial Nominating Commission.

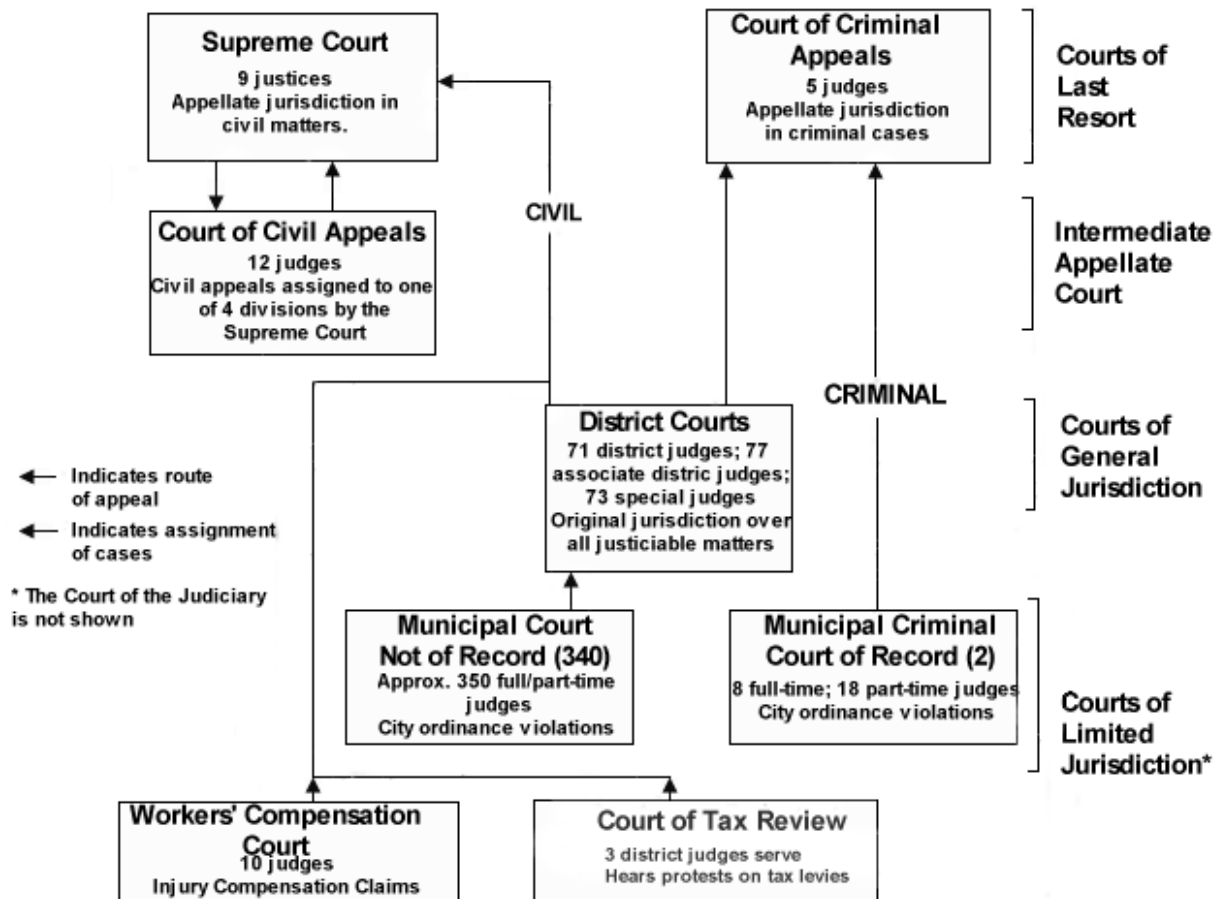
In making its decisions, the Oklahoma Supreme Court interprets both the State and Federal Constitutions. If the question presented is one purely of state law, the Oklahoma Supreme Court is the final arbiter. An opinion of the Oklahoma Supreme Court, based on the Oklahoma Constitution, affording greater rights than those preserved by the United States Constitution may not be overturned by the United States Supreme Court. The Oklahoma Supreme Court decides no criminal cases. Criminal cases fall within the exclusive appellate jurisdiction of the Court of Criminal Appeals. In recent years, the backlog of the Court of Criminal Appeals has been virtually extinguished, guaranteeing that both the State and individual litigants have a speedy resolution of appellate issues relating to crimes committed in Oklahoma. If a conflict arises over the jurisdiction of the two courts --- Supreme Court or Court of Criminal Appeals --- the Supreme Court determines which court has jurisdiction. Its determination is final and not subject to review.

Over the last ten years, the Oklahoma Supreme Court has reduced its backlog of cases from 3,331 in 1998 to 1,476 in January of this year. In 1997, the Supreme Court disposed of 2,142 cases -- 232 more cases than were filed. Every case filed has been assigned to a Supreme Court Justice or to a Judge of the Court of Civil Appeals. During 1999, it is expected that cases decided within six months of the date of assignment and within nine months after assignment in the Supreme Court.

The Court of Civil Appeals is responsible for the majority of appellate decisions. These opinions may be released for publication either by the Court of Civil Appeals or by the Supreme Court. When the opinions are released for publication by the Supreme Court, they have precedential value. The Court of Civil Appeals is made up of four divisions, each composed of three Judges. Two divisions of the Court of Civil Appeals are located in Oklahoma City and two are housed in Tulsa.

Organizational Chart

Judicial System





Bringing a case before the Appellate Courts

In Oklahoma, all litigants are entitled to one appeal as a matter of right. Appeals to the Court of Criminal Appeals come directly from the District Court. All appeals in civil cases are made to the Oklahoma Supreme Court. Appeal may be made to the Supreme Court from the District Court, Workers' Compensation Court, Court of Tax Review, and state agencies such as the Department of Public Safety, Oklahoma Tax Commission, Oklahoma Corporation Commission and the Department of Human Services. Many of these appeals are directed by the Supreme Court to one of four divisions of the Court of Civil Appeals. Most cases reviewed in the Supreme Court are from the Court of Civil Appeals. These cases come before the Supreme Court on petitions for certiorari.

Certiorari allows the Supreme Court to bring the record up from the Court of Civil Appeals and to review the Court of Civil Appeals' decision. A review of an opinion of the Court of Civil Appeals in the Supreme Court on writ of certiorari is a matter of sound judicial discretion, and will be granted only when there are special and important reasons, and if a majority of the Justices direct that certiorari be granted. Certiorari may be granted when: the Court of Civil Appeals has decided a question of substance not previously determined by the Oklahoma Supreme Court; or the decision of the Court of Civil Appeals does not conform with a decision by the Oklahoma Supreme Court or the United States Supreme Court; or the Court of Civil Appeals divisions have issued conflicting opinions; or when the Court of Civil Appeals' decision is a substantial departure from the usual course of judicial proceedings.

When new first impression issues, or important issues of law, or matters of great public interest are at stake, the Supreme Court may retain a case directly from the trial court. In addition to appeals from a trial, issues come to the Supreme Court within its general superintending control over all inferior courts, agencies, commissions and boards created by law, with the exception of the Court on the Judiciary and the Senate sitting as a Court of Impeachment.



Disposition of cases pending before the Supreme Court

The Supreme Court operates very differently from a trial court. There is no jury and, except on very rare occasions, no testimony from witnesses. The Court receives the record of the trial (transcript), and any court papers filed in the case (record), and the written arguments (briefs) of the lawyers. The Supreme Court has total discretion in deciding which cases it will hear. Cases which are not directed to the Court of Civil Appeals for decision are assigned on a rotating basis to an individual Justice by the Chief Justice. If the Chief Justice is disqualified, the assignment is made by the Vice Chief Justice. Cases coming to the Court from the Court of Civil Appeals on certiorari are assigned during Monday Conferences, also on a rotating basis. A petition for certiorari must contain the Court of Civil Appeals' opinion deciding the issues presented. The opinion is reviewed by a Referee and the petition for certiorari, the response to the petition, the reply, and a memorandum with a recommendation are submitted to an individual Justice for review. The assigned Justice makes a recommendation to the Court. The granting or denial of a petition for certiorari is discretionary. If a petition is denied, the Court of Civil Appeals' opinion becomes the final judgment and the law of that case. If a petition for certiorari is granted, the case is assigned to a Justice to write an opinion.

Once a case is assigned to an individual Justice, the Justice and the Justice's legal staff independently research the issues presented. A proposed opinion is presented to each of the other eight Justices, and the opinion is considered in one of two regularly scheduled weekly Conferences. All members of the Court assemble twice weekly, on Monday and Thursday mornings, in the Supreme Court Conference Room. These regularly scheduled private meetings are generally referred to as "Conferences", which are not subject to the Open Meetings Law. On Mondays, the Court considers petitions for certiorari, bar disciplinary matters, and applications for extraordinary relief (often referred to as original jurisdiction matters). On Thursdays, the Court considers proposed opinions drafted by individual Justices. The Justices have approximately a week to study the matters considered in Monday and Thursday Conferences. Tuesdays and Wednesdays are "circulation days" on the Court. On Tuesdays, matters for next week's Monday Conference are distributed to each Justice. Matters for Thursday Conferences are given to each Justice on Wednesday before Thursday Conferences the next week. During Conference, as each case is called and discussed, each Justice casts a vote on that case.

Under art. 7, §5 of the Oklahoma Constitution, the concurrence of the majority of the Justices is necessary to decide any question. Because the Oklahoma Supreme Court is composed of nine members, an opinion must receive at least five votes. If the Court's opinion is not unanimous, other Justices may write dissenting opinions. Even if a Justice agrees with the result reached by the

majority opinion, the Justice may author a concurring, concurring specially, concurring-in-result, or concurring-in-judgment opinion stating the reasons why the law as stated by the majority opinion is correct in the cause presented. If a Justice agrees with the law expressed in an opinion, the vote is to concur. If the Justice disagrees with the law as expressed or applied in an opinion, the vote is a dissent. Concurring and concurring specially votes are treated as a full concurrence and may be counted in obtaining a majority vote. Concurring-in-result and concurring-in-judgment votes may not be counted as votes to form a majority opinion.

Any opinion issued by the Court is a product of many hours of in-depth, detailed study and research. These opinions and orders are handed down each Tuesday. Copies are mailed to the attorneys. Parties dissatisfied with the Court's opinion may file a petition for rehearing requesting the Court to take a second look at the law or the reasoning used in support of the result reached. Once an opinion has been issued, copies are available to the general public in the office of the Court Clerk. After an opinion is adopted, it becomes legal precedent, and guides lawyers, litigants, and judges in future cases.

When an issue is particularly novel or of great importance, the Court may order the parties to appear for oral argument. Generally, each side will be given 30 minutes to present its case. This time may be divided between the original argument and rebuttal. Later, at a private conference, the Justices discuss the arguments presented, and the Justice originally assigned the case will author a proposed opinion. This proposed opinion, like all others, is considered by all nine Justices and voted upon in Conference.



The Supreme Court and the Judicial System

Deciding cases is only one of the Supreme Court's functions. The Court is also responsible for administering the state's entire judicial system. The Court establishes rules of operation for all other courts in the state. The Supreme Court formulates the rules for practice of law, which govern the conduct of all attorneys, and it administers discipline in appropriate cases. Additionally, many of the Justices make personal appearances to speak to members of the Bar, civic clubs, and educational groups. These appearances are made in an attempt to help all citizens understand the Court's workings and to inform them of the decision-making process. The Justices are also called upon to administer official oaths of office to public officials.

Pursuant to the Okla. Const., art. 7, §1, 2, the Court selects from its members a Chief Justice and a Vice Chief Justice. The Court selects a new Chief Justice every two years. The Chief Justice, who is the first among equals, presides at all court sessions, and chairs the state judicial conference. Together with the other members of the Court, the Chief Justice administers the judicial branch of state government and represents the Court and the judicial system in public appearances. The Vice Chief Justice's term of office is coextensive with that of the Chief Justice.



Photo by BRUCE SPENCE

Active-retired Justice Hardy Summers and his daughter, Assistant Public Defender for Oklahoma County, Julia Summers



The Kiowa Black Leggings Society and United States Supreme Court Associate
Justice Sandra Day O'Connor at The Sovereignty Symposium IX.

The Oklahoma Supreme Court is committed to Continuing Legal Education for judges and lawyers. The Supreme Court sponsors an annual Sovereignty Symposium assisted by the Oklahoma Indian Affairs Commission and the Sovereignty Symposium, Inc. This gathering is recognized as the premier conference in the country on Indian Law. The curriculum features comprehensive coverage of legal issues involving indigenous peoples. Lectures and open discussions leave attendees, as well as the bench and practicing bar, with a better understanding of the historical perspective and the contemporary legal issues facing tribal, state, and federal governments. The Sovereignty Symposium was established to provide a forum in which ideas concerning common legal issues could be exchanged in a scholarly, non-adversarial environment. The Supreme Court espouses no view on any of the issues, and the positions taken by the participants are not endorsed by the Court.



PHOTOS BY JIM PATTERSON

Vietnam Era Veterans Intertribal Association, George Wittman, Jerry Riley, John T. McIntosh, and Jim Burgess with Former Chief Justice Yvonne Kauger and Ada Deere, Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs, Department of Interior at Sovereignty Symposium X.



Senator Kelly Haney, Robert Henry, Judge 10th Circuit Court of Appeals, and JUSTICE RUDOLPH HARGRAVE at Sovereignty Symposium X.

The Oklahoma Supreme Court works closely with the federal judiciary. The Court is often called upon to answer federal certified questions pursuant to the Uniform Certification of Questions of Law Act. 20 O.S. 1991 § 1601, *et seq.* Certified questions are issues raised in a federal case for which there is no Oklahoma law, and the Oklahoma Supreme Court is called upon to settle the issue. Justices also participate in a program involving state, tribal and federal judges. The 10th Circuit Task Force on Federal, State and Tribal Relations is chaired by 10th Circuit Chief Judge Stephanie Seymour.

Members of the Oklahoma judiciary and their staff are governed by very strict rules of ethical conduct called the Code of Judicial Conduct. Judicial officers are charged with maintaining the integrity and independence of the judiciary. No Justice or Judge may lend the prestige of the office to advance any private interest. They must refrain from participation in political activities. They may not hold offices in political organizations, make speeches for political organizations or candidates, or solicit funds for a political organization or make, directly or indirectly, contributions to political organizations or candidates. A Justice or Judge on a retention ballot may campaign only if there is active opposition to retention. Members of the judiciary may not personally raise money to counter such opposition. Instead, a committee must be formed to solicit and manage campaign monies. All members of the judiciary must not only avoid actual impropriety, they must avoid even its appearance in all of their activities. They are required to regulate extra-judicial activities in order to minimize any possible conflict of interest with the exercise of judicial duties.



Supreme Court Staff

The Chief Justice is assisted by the Central Staff of the Court. This staff is made up of the Court's Marshal, five Referees, a Chief Administrative Assistant, and a receptionist. In addition, the Chief Justice takes regular staff members with her into the Chief Justice's Chambers. This staff is made up of two staff attorneys and the Chief's personal administrative assistant. The Marshal is often called upon by lawyers to answer procedural questions and acts as the Court's record-keeper for the number and kinds of cases that the Court handles each year. The Marshall drafts and issues orders as directed by the Justices. The referees, all attorneys, evaluate hundreds of petitions for certiorari and they are called upon to conduct oral arguments and hearings which are not appropriate for hearing by the entire Court.

Each Justice is authorized to hire two full-time staff lawyers, and one administrative assistant. The clerical-support staff member is responsible for handling the individual Justice's calendars, preparing the dockets for Monday and Thursday Conferences, circulating proposed opinions and orders, and numerous other office duties. The Justice's Judicial Assistants are highly qualified lawyers who aid the Justice in researching and drafting proposed opinions. The Court has some funds for legal internships. The Court hires, on a part-time basis, outstanding students who are interested in gaining experience by working for the Court. In addition to regular staff members of each Justice, the Chief Justice is provided with additional staff who assist in the administrative duties of the Office of the Chief Justice.

The Clerk of the Supreme Court attends all sessions of the Court held in the Courtroom, calls the Court to session, maintains official hearing records, operates recording and timing equipment, and ensures that proper Courtroom procedures are observed. The Clerk is the Court's record-keeper. The Clerk maintains operational contact with the parties and attorneys for all cases. The Clerk's office is the repository for all filings made in connection with any case the Supreme Court hears. The Clerk also serves as the Clerk of the Court of Criminal Appeals, the Courts of Civil Appeal, the Court on the Judiciary, and the Court of Tax Review.

The Administrator for the Courts and his staff, under supervision of the Chief Justice and the Court, coordinates judicial operations and personnel throughout the state handling payroll, training, data systems, research, and other responsibilities.

The Oklahoma Supreme Court's Move to the Web

On January 17, 1997, the Oklahoma Supreme Court began implementation of the "Oklahoma State Courts Network" (OSCN), an internet-based service designed to provide the public and the Bar with access to the public legal documents of the State of Oklahoma. In May of 1997, the Court also adopted the Public Domain Citation System for its case law, as recommended by the American Association of Law Librarians and the American Bar Association. These two events kicked off what has become one of the largest electronic public access projects ever undertaken by a state government entity.

OSCN has been under continual development since the beginning of 1997, and it is now one of the largest freely available repositories of legal information on the Internet. The entire body of Oklahoma appellate case law is available on OSCN. In addition, full text of the Oklahoma Statutes, with historical data, is available. Oklahoma Session laws, the Oklahoma Constitution, Oklahoma Registry of Frivolous or Malicious Appeals, Oklahoma Attorney General Opinions, Oklahoma Uniform Jury Instructions, Oklahoma Fee and Bond Schedules, Fee and Copy Schedules for the Appellate Courts, Interest on Judgments, Oklahoma Legal Forms, and many other types of documents are also included. The address for OSCN is www.oscn.net.

OSCN provides a fielded search system for all of the documents within its databases. OSCN also provides a service entitled "The Citationizer" for tracking and checking citations to case law.

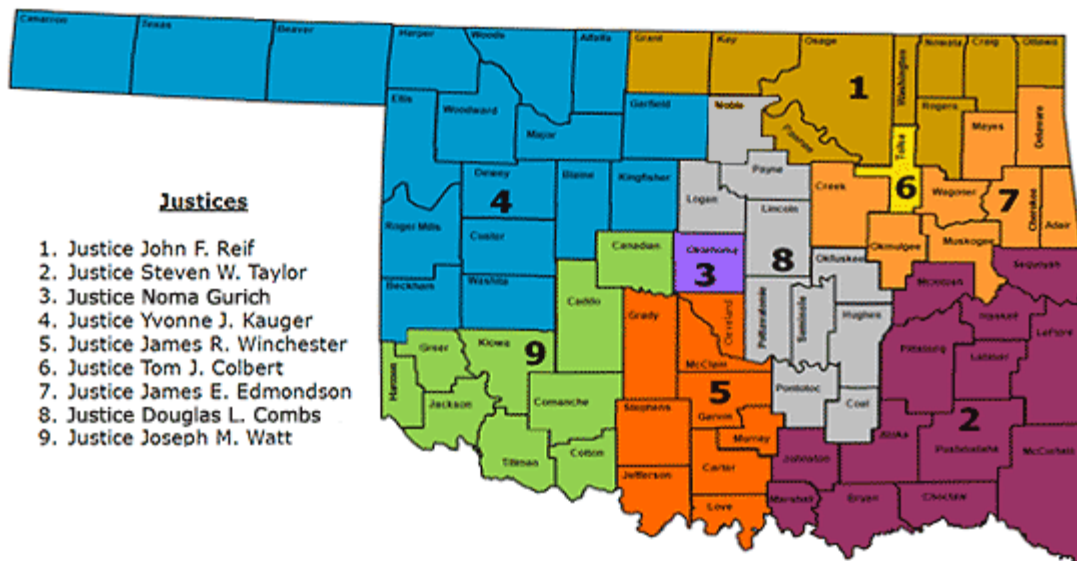
The Management Information Services Department (MIS) operates as a department of the Administrative Office of the Courts. MIS is responsible for automation and data management for all appellate and district courts within the State of Oklahoma. The Department is also responsible for the implementation and operation of OSCN.



The Justices of the Oklahoma Supreme Court

The Oklahoma Supreme Court is a constitutional tribunal consisting of nine Justices. Each Justice is selected from one of nine judicial districts and sits for a six-year term. Each Justice must be at least thirty years old, shall have been a qualified elector in the appropriate district for at least one year immediately prior to the appointment, and have been a licensed practicing attorney or judge of a court of record for five years preceding appointment. The Justices must maintain their status as licensed attorneys while holding office.

Justices are appointed by the Governor from the list of candidates presented by the Judicial Nominating Commission. Applicants for appointment to the Supreme Court are subjected to extensive investigation by the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation and to intensive interviews by the Judicial Nominating Commission (a constitutional commission consisting of attorneys and non-attorneys). The Justices stand for retention on a six-year rotating schedule. The retention ballot appears on general election ballots and is a non-partisan, non-competitive election process. If a Justice resigns or dies during a term, vacancies are filled by gubernatorial appointment from the appropriate Supreme Court judicial district. Newly appointed Justices who serve more than one year must stand for retention at the next regular general election.



JUSTICE JOHN F. REIF, District No. 1

Appointed: October 22, 2007 by Governor Brad Henry

Born: June 19, 1951

Education: Cascia Hall of Tulsa, 1969

University of Tulsa, Bachelor's, 1973

University of Tulsa, Juris Doctor, 1977

Business & Professional Positions: Planner and Grants

Specialist for the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration,

Indian Nations Council of Government, 1974 – 1977; Assistant District Attorney for Tulsa County, 1978 – 1981; Business Law Adjunct Professor; Oral Roberts University, 1983 - 2007
Public Service: Police Officer for the City of Owasso, Oklahoma, 1973 – 1975; Faculty Member, National Tribal Judicial Center of the National Judicial College, Reno, Nevada
Judicial Service: Special District Judge for the Fourteenth Judicial District, 1981 – 1984; Judge for the Oklahoma Court of Civil Appeals, 1984 – 2002; Court's Vice Chief Judge, 1993 and 2001; Chief Judge, 1994 and 2002
Awards: Oral Roberts University – President's Distinguished Service Award, 1995
Professional Organizations: Oklahoma Bar Association, 1978 to present

Justice Reif and his wife have been married 34 years.



CHIEF JUSTICE STEVEN W. TAYLOR, District No. 2

Chief Justice Steven W. Taylor was born June 7, 1949 in Henryetta, Oklahoma. He graduated McAlester Public Schools in 1967. He earned his B.A. in Political Science from Oklahoma State University in 1971. Justice Taylor received the Juris Doctor degree from the University of Oklahoma College of Law in 1974.

Taylor joined the United States Marine Corps in 1970 and served on active duty from 1974-1978. He was trained as an infantry platoon commander and later served as a prosecutor and Chief Defense Counsel. In 1977 he became the youngest judge in the U.S. Armed Forces. He was promoted to the rank of Major.

Following his active duty service in the Marines, Taylor practiced law in McAlester from 1978-1984. In 1980 he was elected to the McAlester City Council and in 1982 was elected Mayor of McAlester, making him the youngest Mayor in that city's history. He was named one of Three Outstanding Young Oklahomans for 1983. In 1985, in recognition of Taylor's leadership in economic development, the City of McAlester named a multi-million dollar industrial park for him where many industries now employ several hundred Oklahomans. In 1997 he was named "Citizen of the Year" in McAlester. Taylor serves on the Board of Directors of the Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation, Oklahoma City National Memorial and the Oklahoma Heritage Association. He is a member of the First United Methodist Church of McAlester and is a trustee of Oklahoma City University. His wife Mary is a teacher in the McAlester Public Schools. They have one son Wilson. Justice Taylor is the co-author of a book, *The University of Oklahoma College of Law: A Centennial History*.

In 2002 Taylor was recognized by Oklahoma State University as a "Leadership Legacy" and 2003 "Distinguished Alumnus". In 2007 Justice Taylor was inducted into the Oklahoma State University Hall of Fame and in 2009 the University of Oklahoma presented him with the Regents Alumni Award. He is the only person to have received the highest alumni recognition from both O.S.U. and O.U.

In March 1984 Governor George Nigh appointed Taylor Associate District Judge for Pittsburg County. In 1991 he was the first Associate District Judge ever to be elected President of the Oklahoma Judicial Conference. In 1994, Taylor was elected District Judge of the 18th Judicial District. In 1997 and 2003 he was elected Presiding Judge of the ten county East-Central Judicial Administrative District. Taylor was the recipient of the Oklahoma Bar Association "Award of Judicial Excellence" in 2003 as the outstanding Oklahoma judge of the year.

In his over 20 years as a trial judge, he presided over more than 500 jury trials including the Terry Nichols Oklahoma City bombing case.

On September 24, 2004, Governor Brad Henry appointed Taylor to be a Justice of the Supreme Court of Oklahoma.

During the 2007 Oklahoma Centennial year *Oklahoma* magazine named Justice Taylor as one of the "100 Who Shaped Us" - a list of living and past Oklahomans who influenced the first 100 years of our state. In 2009 Justice Taylor was inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame, the highest honor an Oklahoman can receive from the state.

Office: Room 200, State Capitol Building, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73105. Telephone: (405) 521-3844.

JUSTICE NOMA GURICH, District No. 3



Justice Noma D. Gurich was born on September 26, 1952 in South Bend, Indiana. In 1971, she graduated from Penn High School in Mishawaka, Indiana. She was graduated Magna Cum Laude from Indiana State University in 1975 with a degree in Political Science. Gurich received her Juris Doctorate degree from the University of Oklahoma College of Law in 1978. She was an editor of the American Indian Law Review and received the Professional Responsibility Award. Justice Gurich has lived in Oklahoma City for more than 30 years. Before she began her judicial career, Gurich was engaged in the private practice of law in Oklahoma City for 10 years. In 1988, Gurich was appointed by Governor Henry Bellmon to serve as a Judge on the Oklahoma Workers' Compensation. She served as Presiding Judge of that court for four years. She was reappointed for a second term by Governor David Walters in 1994.

After being appointed by Governor Frank Keating to the District Court bench in July of 1998, she won a county-wide election for District Judge that same year. She was re-elected without opposition in 2002, 2006 and 2010. Judge Gurich served as the Presiding Administrative Judge for the Seventh Judicial District, Oklahoma County from January of 2003 to December 31, 2004. Judge Gurich presided over more than 190 jury trials during her career as District Judge. While serving as a District Judge, Gurich served as the Presiding Judge of both the 11th and 12th Multi-county Grand Juries (2007-2008 and 2009-2010) by order of the Chief Justice of the Oklahoma Supreme Court.

Justice Gurich was appointed by Governor Brad Henry as the third woman Justice of the Supreme Court of Oklahoma and she took office on February 15, 2011. Justice Gurich served as President of the William J. Holloway, Jr. American Inn of Court from 2007 to April of 2008. She continues as a Master member of the Inn. She received the 2003 Mona Salyer Lambird Spotlight Award from the OBA Women in Law Committee. She is a two time Journal Record Honoree for Woman of the Year in 2005 and 2008. She is Past President and member of the Kiwanis Club of Oklahoma City and was only the second woman President of the 90 year old club when she served in 2006-2007. She serves annually on the Application Screening Committee for the Oklahoma School of Science and Mathematics. Justice Gurich is an active member of St. Luke's United Methodist Church, where she is a volunteer Mobile Meals driver and TV camera operator. Judge Gurich served as a missionary to Russia in 1993, 1997, 2000, 2002, and 2004.

Justice Gurich is married to John E. Miley, who is the General Counsel of the Oklahoma Employment Security Commission. The office of Justice Gurich is located in Room 238, State Capitol Building, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73105; (405) 521-3839.



JUSTICE YVONNE KAUGER, District No. 4

Justice Kauger, District 4. Justice Yvonne Kauger is a fourth generation Oklahoman from Colony, Oklahoma, who was born in Cordell on August 3, 1937. She was appointed to the Oklahoma Supreme Court on March 11, 1984 by Governor George Nigh. Justice Kauger chairs the Building Committee for the Oklahoma Judicial Center. She served as Chief Justice of the Oklahoma Supreme Court from January 1997 to December of 1998. Kauger has served as Presiding Judge for the Court on the Judiciary, and on the Law School and Bench and Bar Committees of the Oklahoma Bar Association. She founded the Gallery of the Plains Indian in Colony and co-founded Red Earth. She has acted as Symposium Coordinator for The Sovereignty Symposium, a seminar on Indian law sponsored by the Oklahoma Supreme Court since its inception in 1987. Kauger has received many awards including

Valedictorian of her high school class in Colony, and first in her class at OCU School of Law, National Delta Zeta of the year for 1988, and Oklahoma City Pioneer Award for 1989. She was the featured speaker at the Twentieth William O. Douglas Lecture Series at Gonzaga University in November 1990. She received an honorary doctorate from OCU in 1991. She has been named a distinguished alumnus by OCU and by Southwestern Oklahoma State University. On June 7, 1999, she was awarded the Herbert Harley Award by the American Judicature Society in recognition of her outstanding efforts to improve the administration of justice. She is one of only four Oklahomans to have ever received the award and it has been twenty years since an Oklahoman last received the award. In November of 1999, she was honored by the Oklahoma Bar Association with the Judicial Excellence Award. In March, 2001, Justice Kauger was inducted into the Oklahoma Women's Hall of Fame. She is a member of the District State-Federal Judicial Council and of the Washita County Hall of Fame. She was adopted by the Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes of Oklahoma in 1984. Her daughter, British solicitor/lawyer, Jonna Dee Kauger Kirschner, practices law in Oklahoma City. Her CPA son-in-law, Bruce Scambler, became a naturalized citizen in May, 1999. Her first grandson, Jay Michael Eduard Kauger Scambler, attends third grade and plays Suzuki violin and baseball. Her second grandson Winston Jon Eagle Kauger Scambler was born August 31, 2000. Office: Rm 242, State Capitol Bldg., Oklahoma City 73105; Telephone: 405/521-3841..

Former Chief Justice Kauger's daughter, Jonna Kauger Kirschner, and renowned Native American artist and creator of the Capitol mural depicting the five Oklahoma Native American ballerinas, Mike Larsen, unveil a portrait during the Chief Justice's swearing in ceremonies. The portrait, commissioned by the Former Chief Justice's family, was created by Larsen and it pictures a Native American Chief.



JUSTICE JAMES R. WINCHESTER, District No. 5

Justice James Winchester was appointed Jan. 4, 2000 as a member of the Supreme Court of Oklahoma, the state's court of last resort for civil matters. A native of Clinton, Oklahoma, Justice Winchester received his bachelors of art from the University of Oklahoma and his juris doctorate from Oklahoma City University.

After graduating from law school, Justice Winchester practiced law in Weatherford and Hinton before being named Associate District Judge for Caddo County in Jan. 1983. In Dec. 1983, at age 30, Justice Winchester became one of the youngest district judges in the state when he was appointed as District Judge for the Sixth Judicial District of Oklahoma. During his tenure as a

district judge, he tried more than 200 jury trials, ranging from fraud to first-degree murder death-penalty cases.

Justice Winchester was named Outstanding State Trial Court Judge by the Oklahoma Trial Lawyers Association in 1986 and served as an executive board member of the Oklahoma Judicial Conference from 1992 to 1996. He served as President of the Oklahoma Judicial Conference in 1995.

Justice Winchester believes the children of this state are one of our most valuable assets and he established the second in-state program for *Children Coping With Divorce* to assist children during that difficult time.

From August 1997 to January 2000, Justice Winchester served as a U.S. Administrative Law Judge.

Justice Winchester is a member of the current Leadership Oklahoma class. He currently resides in Chickasha, Oklahoma with his wife, Rep. Susan Winchester and their son, Davis.



VICE-CHIEF JUSTICE TOM COLBERT, District No. 6

Vice-Chief Justice Tom Colbert was born on December 30, 1949, in Oklahoma City, OK. He attended Eastern Oklahoma State College, where he earned his Associates Degree in 1970. He then attended Kentucky State University, where he earned his Bachelor of Science in 1972 and his Masters in Education in 1976. He then served in the United States Army, active duty, in the Criminal Investigation Division, from 1973-1975 and received an honorable discharge. Colbert received his Juris Doctorate from the University of Oklahoma College of Law in 1982. He was named to Phi Delta Phi and the NCAA All American during his college career. Colbert was Assistant Dean at Marquette University Law School from 1982-1984. He served as Assistant District Attorney in Oklahoma County from 1984-1986, before going into private practice at Miles-LaGrange & Colbert from 1986-1989. He then worked in private practice with Colbert and Associates from 1989-2000. Colbert served as an attorney for the Oklahoma Department of Human Services from 1988-89 and again from 1999-2000. Colbert was appointed Judge on the Oklahoma Court of Civil Appeals in November 1999. He served as Chief Judge of that Court in 2004. On October 7, 2004, Governor Brad Henry appointed Colbert to be Justice of the Supreme Court of Oklahoma. Justice Colbert is the first African-American appointed to the Oklahoma Court of the Civil Appeals and also the first African-American to be appointed to the Supreme Court of Oklahoma. He is a member of the American Bar Association, the Oklahoma Bar Association, the Tulsa County Bar Association and the National Bar Association. He participates in the Track & Field Masters Level, the mentoring program for young men and the summer reading program for children. His wife, Doretha Guion, is an educator. He has three grown children. Office: Room 204, State Capitol Building, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73105. Telephone: (405) 521-3843.



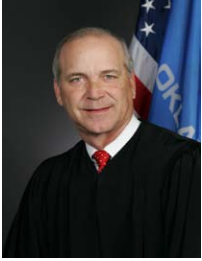
JUSTICE JAMES E. EDMONDSON, District No. 7

Justice James E. Edmondson was appointed to the Supreme Court by Governor Brad Henry on December, 2, 2003. Edmondson served as District Judge for District 15 since 1983. Before serving as District Judge, Edmondson was a partner in the Edmondson Law Office (1981-1983). In Oklahoma's Eastern District, Edmondson served as Acting U.S. Attorney (1980-1981), and as Assistant U.S. Attorney (1978-1980). He also served as Muskogee County's Assistant District Attorney (1976-1978).

Edmondson received his B.A. degree from Northeastern State University in Tahlequah in 1967. He served in the U.S. Navy (1967-1969) before attending Georgetown Law where he received his law degree in 1973.

Born in Kansas City, Missouri, Edmondson has lived in Oklahoma for 55 years. He and his wife, Suzanne, have two grown children.

Office: Room 202, State Capitol Building, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73105. Telephone: (405) 521-3830



JUSTICE DOUGLAS L. COMBS, District No. 8

Justice Combs was born on October 17, 1951 in Shawnee, Oklahoma. He is a resident of Shawnee, Oklahoma. Combs is also a member of the Muscogee Nation. Combs was appointed by Governor Brad Henry as Justice to the Supreme Court of Oklahoma on January 1, 2011. He served as district judge in the twenty-third judicial district from 2003 through 2010, and served as special district judge from 1995 to 2003. Prior to taking the bench Combs was in private practice and served as an assistant state attorney general and as a deputy clerk for the Oklahoma Supreme Court.

Justice Combs graduated from Shawnee High School in 1969. He attended St. Gregory's Junior College, now St. Gregory's University and the University of Oklahoma to earn a bachelor's degree in political science in 1973. He earned his juris doctorate from the Oklahoma City University School of Law in 1976 and was admitted to the bar the same year. Justice Combs has served as chief judge of the twenty-third judicial district and as the presiding judge of the North Central Administrative Judicial District. He served as a board member of the Oklahoma Judicial Conference from 2006 to 2010 and held the office of president of the Oklahoma Judicial Conference in 2009.

Justice Combs is married to Janet Lea Combs and the couple has two children, Christopher, a member of the Oklahoma Bar Association and Eric, a second year law student. Justice Combs can be reached at Room 240, State Capitol Building, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73105 or (405) 521-3847.



JUSTICE JOSEPH M. WATT, District No. 9

Justice Joseph M. Watt was born in Austin, Texas, March 8, 1947. He graduated from Austin High School in 1965. He received his B.A. degree in History/Government from Texas Tech University in 1969, and his Doctor of Jurisprudence Degree from the University of Texas Law School in 1972. That same year, Watt was named Outstanding Law Student in the Nation by the Delta Theta Phi Law Fraternity and he was elected to the University of Texas Circle of Omicron Delta Kappa National Honorary Leadership. Watt was admitted to practice law in both Texas and Oklahoma. He moved to Altus, Oklahoma, in 1973, and was in private practice there from 1973 to 1985. During that time, he served as City Prosecutor for 12 years and as City Attorney from 1980 to 1985. Watt was appointed Special District Judge for Jackson County, Oklahoma, in 1985, and thereafter, was elected by voters to be Associate District Judge in 1986. He served in that capacity until January, 1991, when he was asked to serve as Governor's General Counsel. On May 18, 1992, Watt was appointed to the Supreme Court of Oklahoma and was retained by the voters in 1994, 1996 and again in 2002. Having served as Vice-Chief Justice in 2001 and 2002, Watt was unanimously elected by his colleagues on the Supreme Court to serve as Chief Justice in 2003 and 2004. He was again chosen by his colleagues to serve a second consecutive term as Chief Justice beginning in 2005. Watt served the Oklahoma Judicial Conference as Vice-President for two years, President-Elect, and during 1996 as President. He was a member of the Appellate Division on the Court on Judiciary 1997-2002 and Supreme Court Liaison to the Oklahoma Bar Association, 1997-2002. Watt is a past Secretary and President of the Altus Rotary Club and a Paul Harris Fellow. Watt and his wife, Cathy, are the parents of Justin, Christopher, Jennifer (married to Jon Miller) and Michael. They have two grandchildren, Benjamin Watt Miller and Mary Grace Miller. His interests include his family

and — on rarer occasions — a round of golf. Office: Room 245, State Capitol Building, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73105. Telephone: (405) 521-3848.



Justice Watt the late Charles Chibitty, who was the last living Comanche Code Talker, take a moment to pose for a photo.



Justice Watt with wife, Cathy.



Judges of the District Court

The majority of the judiciary in Oklahoma is composed of Judges of the District Court. Often these Judges serve as the first contact a party may have with the judicial system. District Court Judges hear both civil and criminal matters, and they are the backbone of the judiciary. Appeals from the District Courts in civil matters are to the Oklahoma Supreme Court; appeals in criminal matters from these courts are to the Oklahoma Court of Criminal Appeals.

Nine Presiding Judges are elected by their peers to assist in the administration of Oklahoma's trial courts. These judges, representing separate geographic areas, meet monthly with members of the Supreme Court and Court of Criminal Appeals to discuss the administration of justice and topics, trends and developments affecting Oklahoma's judiciary. These meetings provide an effective forum for exchanging information by and between the trial and appellate judges.



Workers' Compensation Court

The Workers' Compensation Court is made up of ten Judges. This limited jurisdiction tribunal considers cases involving on-the-job injuries occurring while an employee is within the scope of employment. Appeals from the Workers' Compensation Court are to the Oklahoma Supreme Court.



Workers' Compensation Court Judges

(Back row) Judge Bob Lake Grove, Judge John M. McCormick, Judge Cherri Farrar, Judge Gene Prigmore, Vice Presiding Judge Michael J. Harkey

(Front row) Judge Eric W. Quandt, Presiding Judge Kent Eldridge, Judge Mary A. Black, Judge Tom Leonard, Judge William R. Foster, Jr.



The Court of Civil Appeals



Photo by Jan Foisy, Milestones Photography

Judges of the Courts of Civil Appeals are (sitting L to R) [Judge John F. Reif](#) (Appointed to the Supreme Court on October 19, 2007), Judge Keith Rapp, Judge Kenneth L. Buettner, Judge Ronald J. Stubblefield, Judge Carol M. Hansen, (standing L to R) Judge Doug Gabbard II, Chief Judge E. Bay Mitchell, Judge Jerry L. Goodman, Judge Glenn D. Adams, Judge Larry E. Joplin, Vice-Chief Judge Jane P. Wiseman, Judge Robert Dick Bell



The Court of Criminal Appeals

The Oklahoma Court of Criminal Appeals is the highest court in the State of Oklahoma with appellate jurisdiction in criminal cases. It is the state court of last resort in criminal matters. The Court derives its origin and jurisdiction from the state constitution, which was formulated by the constitutional convention and submitted to and adopted by the people of Oklahoma at the first election, held on September 17, 1907.



From left [Judge Charles Johnson](#), [Presiding Judge Arlene Johnson](#), [Judge Charles Chapel](#), [Judge Gary Lumpkin](#), and [Vice-Presiding Judge David Lewis](#).

Click [OCCA Online](#) to access the Court of Criminal Appeals information server. This service provides access to the dockets and opinions of the Court of Criminal Appeals, as well as other information, such as a current copy of rules and uniform jury instructions.