



Supreme Court of Appeals State of West Virginia

News

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Former Supreme Court Justice Richard Neely Dies

For immediate release Monday, November 9, 2020

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CHARLESTON, W.Va. – Former Supreme Court Justice Richard Neely died Sunday, November 8, 2020, at his home, of recently diagnosed liver cancer. He was 79.

“Justice Neely dedicated his life to our state’s judicial system as a Justice, practicing attorney and author,” said Chief Justice Tim Armstead. “I first got to know Justice Neely when he was my economics professor at the University of Charleston. He leaves a lasting legacy and his work will live on for many years to come. I send my sincere condolences to his family.”

“I served with Richard Neely for six years and he was truly one-of-a kind!” said Justice Margaret Workman. “He had a colorful personality, a razor-sharp wit, a brilliant mind and a rambunctious sense of humor. He was a lot of fun to work with; and we could disagree on issues without being personally disagreeable. In the 23 years he served on the Court, he left an immense body of work. My deepest condolences to Carolyn, Chase, and John.”

“This is very sad news. Justice Neely’s life was unique in so many respects and his judicial service to the people of West Virginia extensive. My thoughts and prayers go out to his family,” said Justice Evan Jenkins.

Justice John Hutchison said, "I am saddened to learn of the passing of former Justice Neely. His service to the state and to West Virginia’s community of lawyers was significant. He was dedicated to the advancement of the law and the legal profession in our state."

Justice Neely was elected to the West Virginia House of Delegates in 1970. In 1972 he was elected to the Supreme Court of Appeals of West Virginia and re-elected in 1984. He was Chief Justice 1980 to 1981, 1985 to 1986, 1990 to 1991, and 1994 to 1995. He retired from the Court on April 15, 1995.

Justice Neely earned a bachelor's degree in economics from Dartmouth College in 1964 and a law degree from Yale Law School in 1967. He was a Captain in the U.S. Army Artillery from 1967 to 1969, where he served on the personal staff of John Paul Vann in Vietnam and was the author of the economic development portion of the 1969 pacification plan. He was awarded the Bronze Star.

Justice Neely practiced law alone in Fairmont from 1969 to 1973. He was a partner in the Charleston law firm Neely & Callaghan from April 1995 until his death.

He was chairman of the Board of Kane & Keyser Hardware Corp. in Belington from 1970 to 1988 and Manager of Forest Festival Terrace LLC, a real estate holding company. He was a member of the Advisory Board, Bureau of National Affairs (BNA) Class Action Litigation Report from 2000 to the present. He was the author of seven books about law along with numerous articles.

He is survived by his wife, Carolyn, and two sons.

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