

ANNOUNCEMENT
UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS FOR THE SECOND CIRCUIT

Chester J. Straub, a Judge of the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit, a former New York State Assembly Member and Senator, a U.S. Army veteran, and a beloved colleague, family member, and friend, died on July 13, 2024, in Bronxville, New York. He was 87 years old. His passing was announced by Chief Judge Debra Ann Livingston.

Speaking on behalf of the Court, Chief Judge Livingston said, “Judge Straub was a dedicated and insightful jurist who was truly committed to public service. This is a great loss for our Court and for its judges. Over the course of some eighteen years on the bench, Judge Straub led by example. His opinions were invariably models of excellence in legal craftsmanship, and he worked tirelessly to provide not only praiseworthy but prompt dispositions. Judge Straub was ever cognizant of the responsibility attendant on serving on the Court of Appeals. He showed us all what it means to honor this Court’s traditions. This is a sad day for the judges of the Court of Appeals.”

Judge Straub was nominated to the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit by President Bill Clinton and entered judicial service in July 1998. He served with distinction on that Court, which hears appeals from the federal district courts in New York, Connecticut, and Vermont. The Court of Appeals is regarded as one of the nation’s finest courts, with special prominence in commercial and financial cases, as well as criminal cases on appeal from the districts that the Court serves. Judge Straub brought to the Court a wealth of relevant experience.

Judge Straub was born on May 12, 1937, in Greenpoint, Brooklyn. His father operated a small family store, where Judge Straub worked throughout much of his youth. At his Second Circuit induction ceremony, Judge Straub remembered the family business as the epitome of Brooklyn’s melting-pot culture, recalling “gentlemen in yarmulkes dealing with the problems of the local yeshiva,” “bodega owners from Williamsburg trying to determine how they might get the Sanitation Department to respond,” Polish-American women “buying eggs and . . . babkas,” and Italian-Americans “from another part of the community seeking our finest ricotta.” In this atmosphere of inclusion, Judge Straub’s father taught him “how important it is to participate in the public process.”

Judge Straub’s primary and secondary schooling came via St. Stanislaus Kostka School and the now-defunct Brooklyn Preparatory School. In 1958, he received a bachelor’s degree from St. Peter’s College and went on to study at the University of Virginia School of Law, where his contemporaries included three future U.S. senators and two future federal judges. He once remarked that his Polish grandmother, “Babcia,” had suggested he be a priest, doctor, or lawyer—although the former two did not appeal to him, “her advice about the law stuck with me.”

After graduating from law school in 1961, Judge Straub served for two years as a first lieutenant in U.S. Army Intelligence and Security. He then entered private practice at Willkie Farr & Gallagher, where he became a law partner in 1971. Judge Straub quickly emerged as a true citizen-lawyer, serving his clients while simultaneously serving his fellow New Yorkers as an elected official—first in the New York State Assembly, and later in the New York State Senate. In both capacities, Judge Straub represented the people of Greenpoint while living with his family in an apartment above his father’s old store. He resigned from the Senate in 1975 to avoid potential conflicts of interest between his firm and his elective post, but he would continue political involvement as counsel to the campaign to elect Daniel Patrick Moynihan to the United States Senate. After Senator Moynihan’s successful 1976 run, Judge Straub chaired the Senator’s 1982, 1988, and 1994 re-election campaigns, and Senator Moynihan later credited Judge Straub with the idea to create a Judicial Selection Committee to make the judicial appointment process more transparent and bipartisan. Judge Straub also played a key role in state-level judicial appointments, serving as the chair of Governor Mario Cuomo’s Statewide Judicial Screening Committee from 1988 to 1994.

Prior to joining the Second Circuit in 1998, Judge Straub served as a mediator in the Eastern and Southern Districts of New York and as a special master in the New York County Supreme Court. He was also a longtime trustee of the Lenox Hill Hospital, a member of the Cardinal’s Committee for the Laity of the Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New York, and a member of the Knights of Columbus. These experiences informed his time on the bench, where he became well known for writing measured dissents and penning notable election law cases.

“Chet Straub was an outstanding judge and a dear colleague,” said Judge José A. Cabranes. “I was honored by his friendship since the late 1960s, when as a young lawyer I worked on his campaign for re-election to the New York State Assembly from his home district of Greenpoint, Brooklyn. Fair-minded analysis and personal rectitude were hallmarks of his many years of judicial service. Chet’s lifelong devotion to his work—at the State and Federal levels, and across the legislative and judicial branches—distinguishes him as an exemplary public servant who was deeply committed to justice, integrity, and the rule of law.”

Judge Straub took senior judge status in 2008. He is remembered fondly by his assistant of 55 years, Mary Wiczorek, as well as a generation of law clerks who worked in his chambers. “Judge Straub was a wonderful judge and mentor,” said Ted Polubinski, Judge Straub’s first clerk and now a partner at Davis Polk. “He was kind, generous, thoughtful, and a committed public servant. We are all so grateful to have worked with and learned from him—both in our work on cases before the Court, as well as around the lunch table in our daily lunches with him in chambers. The large extended family of his law clerks will miss him very much.”

Judge Straub was predeceased by his eldest son, Chester, Jr., who passed away in 2015. He is survived by his beloved wife of 65 years, Pat; three sons, Michael, Chris, and Robert; and seven grandchildren.

Chester J. Straub lived a life of commitment to public life and devotion to his community. His spirit of fairness and intellectual honesty was unmatched. He will be greatly missed.