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ILLINOIS SUPREME COURT MOURNS PASSING OF JUSTICE MICHAEL A. BILANDIC

SPRINGFIELD -- The Illinois Supreme Court mourns the passing of one of its own. Retired Justice Michael A. Bilandic, former chief justice and mayor of Chicago, passed away at Northwestern Memorial Hospital in Chicago.

“The Court is very saddened by the loss of our brother, Justice Bilandic,” Chief Justice Moses W. Harrison II said. “He was a great jurist but even a greater human being. I personally admired him very much. He was kind and considerate to me and other members of the Court during the whole time that he served.”

Chief Justice Harrison ordered the flag at the Supreme Court Building in Springfield flown at half staff. Wreaths were placed at the main entrance of the building, where the Court was hearing oral arguments at the start of its January term. The oil portrait of Justice Bilandic as Chief Justice, displayed outside the Courtroom, was draped in black.

Justice Bilandic, 78, was elected to the Illinois Supreme Court in 1990 and served as Chief Justice from Jan. 1, 1994 to Jan. 1 1997. He retired in December 2000 after a career in public service and law which stretched to the time when he was a First Lieutenant in the Marine Corps in the Pacific during World War II.

“He was very conscientious, hardworking and was always willing to listen to someone else’s point of view,” said Chief Justice Harrison. “He was very conscientious about improving the administration of justice in Illinois and I thought he was an outstanding Chief Justice. He had the experience of being Mayor of Chicago and he started many new concepts in our system which we continue to benefit from today.”

“Justice Bilandic was a rare and amazing man,” said former Chief Justice Charles E. Freeman, who served with Justice Bilandic during his entire tenure on the High Court. “He has the unique distinction of having served in three branches of government: the legislative, executive and judicial. He served in all with honesty, integrity and dedication.

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“If a person is ever granted immortality, it is perhaps the judiciary that comes closest to allowing that,” added Justice Freeman. “His words and opinions, his decisions will be quoted and followed by lawyers and judges for many years to come. He had a great impact on many important ground-breaking decisions.”

“I admired Justice Bilandic,” said Justice Mary Ann G. McMorrow, who has served on the Court since 1992. “I really considered it a privilege to have been one of his colleagues on the Court.

“Those of us who serve on the Supreme Court appreciate the difficult decisions we are called upon to make. Justice Bilandic, having served in all three branches of government, brought to the Court a unique knowledge of the workings of government. He shared his experiences in all branches with us in a most interesting and delightful way.

“He was a talented man,” continued Justice McMorrow, “He was always a gentleman and totally committed to providing distinguished service to the citizens of Illinois. There is a Latin saying above the door in the back of the Supreme Court which, translated, says, ‘Hear the Other Side.’ Justice Bilandic always listened to and carefully considered both sides of the arguments being presented to the Court. He was totally committed to performing his duties to the best of his ability and really earned the respect and admiration of the attorneys who appeared before him.

“He was a very devoted family man, so proud of his wife and son. He was also a warm and caring person and very compassionate. We will all miss him.”

“Mike was my good friend and confidante,” said Justice James D. Heiple, who also served with Justice Bilandic for 10 years until Justice Heiple retired in December 2000. “I will miss him.”

“Justice Bilandic was a man who possessed a fine intellect, exceptional insight and a marvelous wit,” said Justice Thomas R. Fitzgerald, who was elected to the vacancy created by Justice Bilandic’s retirement. “He was a good friend to all of us and he will be missed.”

Retired Justice John L. Nickels served with Justice Bilandic from 1992 to 1998. “Michael Bilandic was a great friend and a great colleague,” Justice Nickels said. “He will be missed greatly by his family, all of his many friends and colleagues.”

“I always found him to be a man of great wisdom,” said former Justice S. Louis Rathje, who served with Justice Bilandic on the Court for two years until December 2000. “No matter how tense the situation, he could speak humor and lighten the discussion. I found him to be not only a great jurist, but a good friend.”

During his tenure as chief justice, Justice Bilandic streamlined the Administrative Office of Illinois Courts, which serves as the administrative arm of the Court. He encouraged the use of mandatory arbitration, increasing the efficiency of courts. His term as Chief Justice also saw the rewriting of important rules of discovery in trials.

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“My relationship with Justice Bilandic was very close,” said Joseph A. Schillaci, director of the Administrative Office, who considered Justice Bilandic a mentor.

“It was an honor for me obviously to have served for him but it was more of an honor to call him my friend. Level-headedness and common sense were the order of the day with Justice Bilandic,” Schillaci said.

While on the Supreme Court, Justice Bilandic authored more than 225 opinions and reviewed thousands of other cases in which litigants sought review by the Court.

He wrote several landmark opinions, including two which held that HMOs may be held liable for medical malpractice and institutional negligence.

Justice Bilandic was born in Chicago on Feb. 13, 1923. He graduated from St. Mary’s College in Minnesota with a B.S. degree and from DePaul University College of Law with a J.D. degree. He served as a First Lieutenant in the Marine Corps during World War II.

Justice Bilandic began practicing law in Chicago in 1949. He was a member of the Chicago City Council from 1969 through 1976. He was elected Mayor of the City of Chicago in 1976 and served until 1979. He is a former Master in Chancery, Circuit Court of Cook County, and a former special assistant Illinois Attorney General. He was elected to the First District Appellate Court in 1984 where he served until his election to the Illinois Supreme Court in 1990. He served as Chief Justice from January 1994 to Jan. 1 1997. He was a member of the Board of Managers of the Chicago Bar Association.

Justice Bilandic is survived by his wife, Heather, and his son, Michael.