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United States Courts for the Ninth Circuit
Office of the Circuit Executive · 95 7th Street, San Francisco, CA 94103 · (415) 355-8800 · (415) 355-8901 Fax

NEWS RELEASE

July 30, 2020

Contact: Katherine Rodriguez, (415) 355-8800

Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals Mourns Passing of Judge Jerome Farris

SAN FRANCISCO — Judges and staff of the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit are mourning the loss of a distinguished jurist, Senior Circuit Judge Jerome Farris, who died Thursday (July 23). He was 90.

“Judge Farris was an extraordinary judge and human being. He truly was a force of nature, and he was unfailingly generous to his colleagues and many friends,” said Chief Judge Sidney R. Thomas.

“Everyone who knew Judge Farris referred to him as ‘his/her’ good friend, Jerry Farris,” said Chief Judge Emeritus J. Clifford Wallace.

“Remarkable is an understatement. As a compassionate human being, Jerry was a hundred years ahead of his time,” said Chief Judge Emeritus Mary M. Schroeder.

Nominated by President Jimmy Carter, Judge Farris was confirmed by the Senate on September 26, 1979, and received his judicial commission the following day. He maintained chambers in Seattle, Washington, and assumed senior status on March 4, 1995.

Prior to his appointment to the federal bench, Judge Farris had served as a judge of the Washington State Court of Appeals since 1969. He was unanimously elected as the first presiding chief judge of the court in the 1977-1978 term and served as chief judge of Division I from 1977 to 1978. Prior to opening his own law firm, he worked for the law firm of Weyer, Roderick, Schroeter, and Sterne.

As his successor, Circuit Judge M. Margaret McKeown observed, “Jerry was an icon in the Pacific Northwest legal community.”

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“This is indeed a sad day for the court. As the first African-American judge to serve on this court, he left a legacy in which we can all take pride,” said Circuit Judge Johnnie B. Rawlinson. “His passing leaves a gigantic hole in the fabric of our court family,” she added.

Born in Birmingham, Alabama, Judge Farris earned a Bachelor of Science degree with department honors in mathematics at Morehouse College in 1951. After graduating from Morehouse, he served in the United States Army Signal Corps. He then earned a Master of Social Work degree at Clark Atlanta University in 1955 and received his Juris Doctor degree in 1958 from the University of Washington School of Law, where he was a member of the Law Review, a member of the Order of the Coif, and was elected president of the student body. Judge Farris worked as a juvenile probation officer while earning his law degree.

Judge Farris served as a Regent of the University of Washington in 1985. He was a trustee of the Seattle-King County Bar Association and former chairman of the Washington Council of the National Council on Crime and Delinquency. He was a member of the University of Washington Law School Foundation, the Governor’s Conference on Library and Information Science, the Seattle Youth Commission, the King County Mental Health-Mental Retardation Board, and a delegate to the White House Conference on Children and Youth. He served on the boards of Seattle Urban League, Seattle Opportunities Industrialization Center, and United Way. Morehouse College awarded him an honorary degree in 1978.

Judge Farris is survived by two daughters, Juli and Janelle, and a sister, Marian Farris Hatch. He was preceded in death by his wife, Jean Shy Farris.

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