



United States Courts for the Ninth Circuit

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OBITUARY

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Obituary of Senior District Judge Fred Van Sickle of Eastern District of Washington

SAN FRANCISCO – Senior District Judge Fred Van Sickle, of the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Washington, died on September 2, 2021, at the age of 78, after a courageous two-year battle with cancer. He was gracious and noble to the end, not wanting others to be inconvenienced or overly concerned on his behalf.



Eastern District of Washington U.S. Judges

Front row (l-r): District Judge Salvador Mendoza, Jr.; District Judge Thomas O. Rice; & Chief Judge Stanley A. Bastian.

Middle row (l-r): Senior District Judge Wm. Fremming Nielsen; District Judge Justin L. Quackenbush (Ret.); Senior District Judge Robert H. Whaley; Senior District Judge Edward F. Shea; & District Judge Rosanna Malouf Peterson.

Back row (l-r): Senior District Judge Lonny R. Suko; Senior District Judge Fred Van Sickle; Magistrate Judge John T. Rodgers; & former Magistrate Judge James P. Hutton.

Judge Van Sickle was born in Superior, Wisconsin, received his B.S. in history from the University of Wisconsin in 1965, and his J.D. from the University of Washington in 1968. He served in the U.S. Army JAG Corp for two years as a first lieutenant before beginning his legal career in Waterville, Washington. In 1970, Judge Van Sickle was elected as the Douglas County prosecuting attorney and served in that position for five years until he was appointed a Superior Court judge, first in Grant and Douglas counties, and then in Chelan and Douglas counties.

Judge Van Sickle was nominated by President George H. W. Bush in March 1991 and received unanimous Senate confirmation in May 1991. He continued to serve as a federal judge in the Eastern District of Washington, including as a chief judge, for 30 years until his death.

Chief Judge Stan Bastian describes Judge Van Sickle as “a kind, gentle and compassionate man and a friend to all.” Judge Bastian remembers that Judge Van Sickle served as a mentor as he started his own judicial career. Senior Judge William Fremming Nielsen, long-time associate and

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friend of Judge Van Sickle, noted, “Judge Fred Van Sickle was a true gentleman in every way. As a judge he was always prepared, always considerate, and always professional. I was fortunate to have served with him for thirty years and to have had him as a friend.”

Mark Davis, Judge Van Sickle’s longtime career law clerk, fondly remembers three of Judge Van Sickle’s attributes that served him well throughout his legal career: he was an astute judge of character; he possessed an abundance of common sense; and he was remarkably humble. Mark notes that Judge Van Sickle’s humility included his relationship to the law, knowing that he was an interpreter of the law and not a legislator.

Corynn Roche, Judge Van Sickle’s most recent law clerk, adds “Judge Van Sickle steadfastly modeled a considered and thoughtful approach to the law, with fairness to the parties and the process always at the forefront. In this fast-paced profession, he encouraged me to be contemplative and meticulous, and to take the time needed to achieve a just result.” She further noted that Judge Van Sickle was unceasingly kind, generous, and humble. He was optimistic at every turn, even when times were tough. He was devoted to his family. He listened intently, and truly thought about his response before it was given.



Judge Van Sickle and his first courtroom staff, circa 1992: (l-r) Mark Davis, law clerk; Chuck Randazzo, courtroom deputy; Kellie Higginbotham, judicial assistant; District Judge Fred Van Sickle; former law clerk, now District Judge Rosanna Malouf Peterson; & Mark Snover, court reporter.

Judge Rosanna Malouf Peterson was Judge Van Sickle’s first term clerk and notes that for those who served as Judge Fred Van Sickle’s law clerks over the past thirty years, one concept resonates: being fortunate. “We were fortunate to work for a judge who was fair, thoughtful and committed to process. We were fortunate to learn by working with and observing a man who lived his beliefs: being kind, being considerate and being thorough.”

Judge Peterson remembers that Judge Van Sickle did not make his staff feel like they were just employees. He made them feel important, interesting, and capable. He was a great and noble human being; a genuinely kind person, who was thoughtful and truly cared.

Judge Peterson notes that Judge Van Sickle always has been a mentor. “Judge Van Sickle was instrumental in guiding me on the path to succeed him on the bench, both as a district judge and



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as the chief district judge. Because of his mentoring, I benefited as his law clerk, his fellow judge, and his chief judge. But, as with the other law clerks, I know that I was most fortunate and privileged to have had him as a role model, a friend, and being “part of his fold.”

In 1972, Judge Van Sickle married Jane Tidd of Wenatchee who brought three sons and a daughter with her into the marriage. Fred was extremely proud of his children and grandchildren and enjoyed biking, skiing, and boating with his family. He also made sure that all of his grandchildren visited Washington D.C. to see the monuments and visit the Smithsonian. As his children noted, anything that he could do to help his children and grandchildren succeed, he did.

Judge Van Sickle is survived by his wife of 49 years, Jane, and their children: Rob (Bealinda), Scott (Lisa), Steve (Tina), and Nancy (Matt); nine grandchildren; his brother, Peter, and his sister, Barbara.