1997

Peter S. Popovich: A Tribute to a Friend

Lawrence R. Yetka

Follow this and additional works at: http://open.mitchellhamline.edu/wmlr

Recommended Citation
Available at: http://open.mitchellhamline.edu/wmlr/vol23/iss1/1
TRIBUTE

PETER S. POPOVICH: A TRIBUTE TO A FRIEND

The Honorable Lawrence R. Yetka†

I knew Justice Peter S. Popovich for over fifty years. We were both law students at the University of Minnesota in the mid-1940s before he transferred to what is now William Mitchell College of Law.

We met again in the early 1950s when we both served in the Minnesota Legislature. Justice Popovich was already exhibiting great skill in municipal and school law and in public financing. I chaired the House Judiciary Committee for six years, and Justice Popovich was a welcome and outstanding member of that committee, which had as its members almost all of the leaders of the House on both sides of the aisle.

When I retired from the Legislature in the early 1960s, I also became active in municipal and school law. As Cloquet City Attorney, I recommended that Justice Popovich be appointed as a special assistant city attorney and as bond counsel. We worked together on a myriad of legal and funding problems in constructing a city-owned water line from Lake Superior to Cloquet. The project was funded by local bonds and a federal grant. It required special legislation and dealings with a number of area municipalities, the United States Department of Commerce, and area industries. Our work on that project lasted for about four years and made us close friends as well as legal associates. We visited each other's homes and offices, and I became an annual visitor to Justice Popovich's famous picnics held each summer at his Saint Croix River place.

Shortly after I was appointed to the Minnesota Supreme Court in 1973, Chief Justice Sheran appointed me chairman of a

† Associate Justice, Minnesota Supreme Court, 1973-93; Cloquet City Attorney, 1964-73; Special Municipal Judge, 1961-64; Minnesota State Representative, 1951-61.
special select committee to study the needs of the state judicial system. He also appointed me chairman of the Judicial Planning Committee, which recommended the establishment of a new court of appeals and the construction of a new judicial center. Justice Popovich became the first chief judge of the Minnesota Court of Appeals when it started operation in 1983. He immediately set out on a course to make the appeals court outstanding. He joined me in approaching the Legislature to secure funding for a new building, and we served on a special citizen jury to select the site and the design for the new judicial center. In 1987, Justice Popovich was appointed to the supreme court. And, in 1989, as chief justice, when construction of the judicial center had just commenced, he called regular monthly meetings with the architects and contractors to see that the project was completed on time and within the budget.

Many lawyers consider it a source of great pride to be known as a good lawyer. Justice Popovich was not just a good lawyer; he was outstanding. But more than that, he was also an outstanding legislative leader and judge. Rare indeed is a man who can distinguish himself in all three areas.

His greatest legacy to the people of the State of Minnesota was his stellar and outstanding service in being the first chief judge of the Minnesota Court of Appeals, organizing and recommending to the Governor its membership, and setting up the administrative rules for the new court – the best in the nation.

I shall always treasure our association and our friendship.