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Biography

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BIOGRAPHY

Chief Justice Peter S. Popovich is the seventeenth Chief Justice of the Minnesota Supreme Court. He is the first person to have served on both the Minnesota Court of Appeals and the Minnesota Supreme Court.

Peter Stephen Popovich was born in Crosby, Minnesota, on November 27, 1920, of immigrant Yugoslavian parents. He was raised and schooled in Chisholm, Minnesota. He received an Associate of Arts degree from Hibbing Junior College in 1940, and a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Minnesota in 1942. He transferred from the University of Minnesota Law School and graduated from William Mitchell College of Law in 1947 (then Saint Paul College of Law). He was a recipient of the Minnesota Bar Foundation Scholarship.

After graduating from William Mitchell College of Law, he started the law firm of Peterson and Popovich in Saint Paul. He was admitted to the federal and Minnesota State Bar in 1947, and to practice in the United States Supreme Court in 1956.

After losing a legislative bid in 1950, he ran again in 1952 on the campaign slogan, “A name you should remember.” This time he was successful, and he served in the Minnesota House of Representatives for the next ten years. While in the legislature he had a particular interest in education, the judiciary, appropriations, and the Open Meeting Law.

From 1955 to 1963, he was Vice-Chairman of the Education Committee and Vice-Chairman of the Appropriations Committee. In 1955, 1957, 1959, and 1961, he was Chairman of the Education Division of the Appropriations Committee for all educational appropriations including school aid, the University of Minnesota, and the five state colleges. From 1955 to 1959, he was Chairman of the Minnesota Statehood Centennial Commission, and Secretary of the Education Laws Committee and, from 1955 to 1963, he was Chairman of the Motor Vehicle Tax Committee.

He authored a large number of bills, many of which were passed into law, including: the education school code; reapportionment of the legislature; constitutional amendment on
home rule; constitutional amendment regarding the judicial article; constitutional amendment regarding length of legislative sessions; state fund recodification; jury trials; fiduciary security act; Revisor of Statutes recodification measures; Minnesota Administrative Procedure Act; Metropolitan Planning Commission; and various highway safety measures.

In 1953, he was named Outstanding Freshman House Legislator and, in 1959, Most Effective House Legislator by his legislative contemporaries. He was legislative counsel for the Minnesota School Boards Association, Minnesota Business Colleges, Minnesota Broadcasters Association, and various municipalities. As an appointee of Governor Karl Rolvaag he served on the Minnesota State College Board from 1965 to 1969. Governor Harold LeVander appointed him to the Higher Education Coordinating Commission where he served from 1967 to 1969.

He is a member of the Ramsey County Bar, the Washington County Bar, and the Minnesota State Bar Association. He has served as a member of the Legislative Committee of the Minnesota State Bar Association (1955 to 1983), the Lawyers Political Action Committee (1978 to 1983), and the Ethics Committee (1981 to 1983). He is also a member of the American Bar Association.

In 1983, he was appointed the first Chief Judge of the Minnesota Court of Appeals by Governor Perpich. His accomplishments in organizing the Minnesota Court of Appeals have been recognized nationally and today the Court of Appeals is considered a national model of efficiency. He has become synonymous with the maxim, "Justice delayed is justice denied," which he had engraved on a brass plate which he kept on his desk.

1. "Justice delayed is justice denied" is one of the three qualities of justice discussed by Sir Edward Coke in his exposition of the Magna Charta. He wrote, "Hereby it appeareth, that justice must have three qualities, it must be libera, quia nihil iniquius venali justitia; plena, quia justitia non debet claudicare; et celeris, quia dilatio est quaedam negatio; and then it is both justice and right.” E. COKE, 2 INSTITUTES OF THE LAWS OF ENGLAND 55 (1817).

The Latin phrases translate: "[justice must be] free, for nothing is more iniquitous than justice for sale; complete, for justice should not do things by halves; swift, for justice delayed is justice denied . . . ." Schuman, Oregon's Remedy Guarantee: Article I, Section 10 of the Oregon Constitution, 65 OR. L. REV. 35, 38 & n.19 (1986) (quoting E. COKE, 2 INSTITUTES OF THE LAWS OF ENGLAND 55-56 (4th ed. 1671) and translating from Latin into English).
In 1987, the Governor appointed him Associate Justice on the Minnesota Supreme Court, and in 1989, he became its Chief Justice. As Chief Justice, he set a tone in the judiciary that has quickened the pace at every level of the court system. He was also committed to educating the public about the courts. Under his direction, a court information office was established which has reached more than 112,000 visitors to the Capitol each year, 40,000 school children, and 1,000 individuals and organizations with educational materials about the courts.

He was named Outstanding Minnesotan in 1983 by the Minnesota Broadcasters Association and a member of the Honorary Council of the Minnesota Historical Society. He is the recipient of the 1988 Achievement Award from the Foundation for the Improvement of Justice, Inc. In 1990, he received the Freedom of Information Award from the Society of Professional Journalists. In 1991, he received the John R. Finnegan Freedom of Information Award. In 1991, he also received the Minnesota Newspaper Association Distinguished Service to Journalism Award, the St. Cloud State University First Amendment Award, and an honorary doctorate from the William Mitchell College of Law.

He married Gail Javorina of Hibbing, Minnesota, in 1985. He has four children, Vicki, Dorothy, Stephen, and Susan, and three step-children, Michelle, Paul, and Stephen. His hobbies include reading, in particular historical novels, and boating on the St. Croix River.
Hon. Peter S. Popovich  
Chief Justice  
Minnesota Supreme Court  
230 State Capitol  
St. Paul, Minnesota 55155

Dear Chief Justice Popovich:

It has been my privilege to know you over the years in your career as a St. Paul attorney and state representative, and as someone who served so well on the State University Board. Your strong work ethic and stamina allowed you to work the long, hard hours it took to establish the Minnesota Court of Appeals. As Chief Judge you guided the court through its infancy and when you left, it was standing on strong, sturdy legs, ready to go. Last year it was my privilege to appoint you as Chief Justice of the Minnesota Supreme Court.

It's a thrill watching the new judicial building going up across Cedar Avenue, knowing that Minnesota's higher courts will soon have a home of their own and realizing the large part you've played in yet another giant step forward.

Your life is one long record of service and I just want you to know that it has been my distinct pleasure to appoint you to each of the judicial positions you have filled so well.

Sincerely,

RUDY PERPICH  
Governor