

2014

Tribute to Justice Rosalie Wahl

Sharon Sayles Belton

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Recommended Citation

Belton, Sharon Sayles (2014) "Tribute to Justice Rosalie Wahl," *William Mitchell Law Review*: Vol. 40: Iss. 2, Article 18.
Available at: <http://open.mitchellhamline.edu/wmlr/vol40/iss2/18>

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Sharon Sayles Belton[†]

Justice Rosalie Wahl has been described in many ways by those that loved and worked with her.

I have my own words to describe the values and virtues by which she lived her life and how those values impacted the community and me. Justice Wahl was a sage—a person of great knowledge, judgment, and wisdom. When she spoke, we listened, took her advice, and accepted her assessment because she had our trust—earned over decades of servant leadership.

She earned the trust of the community because she was respectful to all and treated everyone with dignity and grace. She was humble and hardworking, putting thousands of hours over her lifetime to causes of violence, abuse, and discrimination guided by her unwavering commitment to the equality of all people and to justice for all. She was “focused on the greater good” and the advancement of justice.

In my book, she was the epitome of integrity, and we as a community benefitted from the fact that she held the people that worked for and with her accountable. The community found an outstanding and courageous advocate for justice in Rosalie Wahl.

It is an honor and privilege to celebrate the life of Justice Rosalie Wahl. Her contributions to strengthening the fabric of our community are numerous. Her personal accomplishments gave us hope that things could change for women, racial minorities, immigrants, and the poor.

Her commitment to equal access to the law was central to everything she did in her legal career. The community continues to benefit from her honest and hard-hitting assessments of racial bias in the judicial system.³³ On behalf of the community, I want to publicly express appreciation and thanks to her for her work, and I want to express this to her colleagues that are here today who supported her with this work and helped to implement the recommendations. It would be right for us to acknowledge that the problems identified in the past are still prevalent today. Justice Wahl blazed and illuminated the trail on the subject of racial bias

† Vice President, Government Affairs and Community Relations, Thomson Reuters Legal Business; former Mayor of the City of Minneapolis; and a friend.

33. See RACIAL BIAS FINAL REPORT, *supra* note 6, at v.

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in the judicial system. In her honor, it might be time to consider another walk down this trail.

Seek the truth, fight for justice, and work for peace. These are the words that readily come to mind when I think about the life's work of Justice Rosalie Wahl. She was a champion for the people of our community that were forgotten or, at worst, invisible to most. She worked tirelessly on behalf of women who had suffered abuse and discrimination, and lent her voice and support to causes to empower women.

Justice Wahl understood the challenges we face as women leaders. As mayor of the City of Minneapolis, on many occasions I called on her for advice and encouragement. In fact there were a couple of women on the bench that were especially helpful during some tough times, Justice Rosalie Wahl was one and Judge Diana Murphy was another. I am grateful. They were part of my kitchen cabinet. Every woman needs a kitchen cabinet. I am lucky that Justice Wahl was a part of mine.

In closing, Rosalie Wahl was given great gifts and she used them well. We all, like our friend Justice Rosalie Wahl, have been given great gifts. In memory and in honor of her dedicated service, let us each pledge to use our gifts in service to others.

It is right, and it is just! Amen.