

KEY DECISIONS

Mississippi U. for Women v. Hogan

Decided: July 1, 1982
Voted: With majority
Decision: 5-4

O'Connor voted with the majority to strike down a rule that blocked men from attending Mississippi University's nursing school.

Hazelwood School Dist. v. Kuhlmeier

Decided: Jan. 13, 1988
Voted: With majority
Decision: 5-3

O'Connor agreed that schools had the right to block students from publishing anything they deemed inappropriate.

Texas v. Johnson

Decided: June 21, 1989
Voted: With minority
Decision: 5-4

The court upheld that burning the American flag was a protected form of speech.

Planned Parenthood v. Casey

Decided: June 29, 1992
Voted: With majority
Decision: 5-4

The court upheld a Pennsylvania law requiring a 24-hour waiting period before abortions and that minors get the permission of at least one parent.

Richmond v. J.A. Croson Co.

Decided: Jan. 23, 1989
Voted: With majority
Decision: 6-3

The court struck down a Richmond, Va., law mandating that construction companies subcontract work to minority-run businesses.

Bush v. Gore

Decided: Dec. 12, 2000
Voted: With majority
Decision: 7-2

The court agreed with George Bush's argument that Florida's recount method in the 2000 presidential election was unconstitutional.

Grutter v. Bollinger

Decided: June 23, 2003
Voted: With majority
Decision: 5-4

O'Connor joined the majority in saying that the Michigan School of Law didn't violate any laws by using race as a factor in admission.

Lawrence, Garner v. Texas

Decided: June 26, 2003
Voted: With majority
Decision: 6-3

The court struck down a Texas law against sodomy.

Rasul v. Bush

Decided: June 28, 2004
Voted: With majority
Decision: 6-3

In a case brought by detainees at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, O'Connor voted with the majority that detainees could appeal their detentions.

Roper v. Simmons

Decided: March 1
Voted: With minority
Decision: 5-4

O'Connor dissented that the death penalty couldn't be applied to cases where the accused was a minor when the crime was committed.



Rise of the first woman Supreme Court justice

Sandra Day O'Connor, who announced her resignation from the U.S. Supreme Court as the first woman ever to serve on it, was born March 26, 1930, in El Paso, Texas.

1950

Graduated magna cum laude from Stanford University with a degree in economics

1952

Graduated from Stanford Law School; married John Jay O'Connor III

1952-53

Served as deputy county attorney of San Mateo County, Calif.

1954-57

Worked as a civilian attorney for Quartermaster Market Center in Frankfurt, Germany

1958-60

Practiced law in Maryvale

Turning down politics was pivotal

Judge stayed on the bench in 1978 race

By LE TEMPLAR
and GARY GRADO
TRIBUNE

If Sandra Day O'Connor had embraced politics instead of the law almost 30 years ago, she might have been Arizona's first woman governor instead of the first woman on the nation's highest court.

O'Connor's national legacy always will be her groundbreaking nomination and 24 years of service on the U.S. Supreme Court. But she has left an even broader imprint on her native state where she has been a daughter of a pioneer family, a savvy Republican politician and a leader of the Arizona legal community.

A critical moment for O'Connor came in 1978, when she was a Maricopa County Superior Court judge. State Republican leaders were searching for someone to challenge Gov. Bruce Babbitt, a Democrat who had just been elevated from attorney general to fill a vacancy. GOP leaders decided to approach O'Connor as a respected follower of the legendary Sen. Barry Goldwater.

She considered the proposal seriously for a few days, and asked for advice from friends, including Melvin McDonald, another Superior Court judge at the time.

"I was about as politically astute as a log laying in the ground," said McDonald, now an attorney living in Gilbert. "I told her, I says, 'Sandra, stop and think about it. You're a Superior Court judge. We've got the new merit system in. You've got the Superior Court judge position for the rest of your life. You'd be nuts to take on Babbitt because you'll never beat him and then you'll never have this judge job.'"

O'Connor decided to stay on the bench, and Babbitt went on to defeat Republican Evan Mecham. Three years



OUT OF THE SAME MOLD: Sen. Barry Goldwater, R-Ariz., and Supreme Court nominee Judge Sandra Day O'Connor talk before her confirmation hearings on Sept. 9, 1981, in Washington.

ASSOCIATED PRESS FILE

later, President Ronald Reagan selected her to break up the all-male club of the U.S. Supreme Court, where she wielded a key swing vote on some of the most significant decisions of our times.

"It will be difficult to fill the void that Justice O'Connor's resignation has created, nor can anyone assume a similar place in American history," said Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., on the Senate floor Friday after O'Connor announced her retirement. "There can be only one first, and Sandra Day O'Connor was it."

A RURAL ARIZONAN AT HEART

Actually born in El Paso, Texas, O'Connor was raised on her family's sprawling Arizona ranch in Graham County near the New Mexico border.

Those who know O'Connor, 75, say that lifestyle defined her approach as one of the most powerful judges in the country.

"If I would put in two words, it would be rugged individualism," said Rep. Jim Kolbe, R-Ariz. "When you grow up on a ranch, you have

to learn to be independent. You have to learn to get things done, and you're just expected to get it done."

She left Arizona to obtain her undergraduate and law degrees from Stanford University, and ranked at the top of her class in 1952. That's also when she married John Jay O'Connor III, and the couple eventually had three sons — Scott, Brian, and Jay.

She worked as a lawyer in California and Germany before arriving in the Valley in 1959. She opened her own firm in Maryville after she discovered the downtown Phoenix law offices didn't hire women.

She served as an assistant state attorney general from 1965-69 and became a close ally and campaign volunteer for Goldwater.

"They were out of the same mold — fiercely independent, very honest and straightforward," said Barry Goldwater Jr., son of the late senator. "You didn't have to ask any questions where they stood on issues. You always got a pretty straight answer."

In 1969, O'Connor was appointed to fill a vacant seat

in the state Senate. Four years later, she became the Senate majority leader as part of a revolt by "urban moderates" against more rural conservatives who had dominated the upper chamber.

ON THE BENCH

Just two years in legislative leadership was enough to prompt O'Connor to turn her eye to the judiciary. She was one of the last trial judges in Maricopa County to be elected by popular vote during the 1974 elections.

In that year, state voters approved the current merit system in which the governor chooses trial judges in Maricopa and Pima counties, who then must go before voters every four years for retention.

Speaking at a Phoenix reception in February 2004, O'Connor said she feared making a major blunder as a novice judge.

But that trepidation never showed, said Edward Rapp, 72, who also was elected to the bench in 1974 as a Democrat.

"She was an incredibly hard worker, she wouldn't take lunch breaks or anything,"

Rapp said.

Even though O'Connor won her election, she publicly campaigned for the proposed new merit system.

"That was something very important and near and dear to her heart," said Chief Justice Ruth McGregor of the Arizona Supreme Court, one of O'Connor's first clerks after she moved up to the U.S. Supreme Court.

O'Connor benefited from the judicial merit system in 1979, when she was appointed to the Arizona Court of Appeals.

Shortly after Reagan was elected in 1980, Rapp ran into O'Connor at a judges' conference. He brought up the idea of her appointment to the Supreme Court.

"She said, 'My chances are not that good. Nobody is going to put two Arizonans on the Supreme Court,'" Rapp said.

Chief Justice William Rehnquist also has Arizona ties.

But O'Connor had a powerful champion in Barry Goldwater, and Reagan wanted to leave a special mark on the court. So the president nominated a woman with no federal judicial experience or national recognition, but who frequently was lauded for her brilliant legal mind.

"I think Sandra brought common sense to the court and was not driven so much driven by dogma like both the right- and left-wingers that I've seen," said Leo Corbit, a friend of O'Connor's and a former state Senate president. "I think she and William Rehnquist are fairly conservative in most areas. But I think they also have a lot of common sense and I think that's going to be a tough thing to replace."

O'Connor's importance to Arizona has been memorialized as her name graces an elementary school in Mesa as well as a high school in Glendale and the new federal courthouse in downtown Phoenix.

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P.V. awaits high-profile return

Mayor 'delighted' to have justice back

By JOHN LEPTICH
TRIBUNE

Sandra Day O'Connor gave her son, Scott, specific instructions for when she and her husband come home late next week.

"She said to make sure I get his luggage at the airport," her son said. "And her golf clubs."

O'Connor, a Paradise Valley resident and the first woman to serve on the U.S. Supreme Court, on Friday announced her retirement. A fourth-generation Arizonan who grew up on a sprawling family ranch, O'Connor still enjoys the outdoors and staying active.

"Like Barry Goldwater, they come home," said Paradise Valley Mayor Ron Clarke. "We're delighted to have our lady back. She's always been a steadying influence on our way of life. People in Paradise Valley really look up to her."

O'Connor, 75, her husband, John,

and her sons have been members of the Paradise Valley Country Club since 1960. Steve Richardson, the club's general manager, said that while the O'Connors have been frequent visitors for golfing, swimming and playing tennis, he hopes to see more of them.

"I'm sure she'll try to spend more time here," Richardson said. "We've seen her a lot, including a few weeks ago. I think she likes to come out and not have all kinds of attention. It's a safe haven for her here. We have a lot of distinguished members. The O'Connors are just like everyone else. When she wasn't in Washington, she was here a lot."

O'Connor also shops at the Safeway at 32nd Street and Camelback Road. Though a corporate representative said media members aren't allowed in the store, a front-end employee confirmed O'Connor is a regular and said she shopped there two weeks ago.

Scott O'Connor speculated that his mother will take a senior status on an appeals court, as the man she replaced, Potter Stewart, did in 1981.

Scott O'Connor said he also expects her to teach a law class at the University of Arizona in addition to writing, traveling, speaking and having a greater presence in the Valley. He said one of the reasons for retirement was to help her husband, who has Alzheimer's disease.

"I thought she might (retire) as the first George Bush era ended," said Scott O'Connor, 47. "She continued and had a growing appreciation of what she did for a living. She really enjoyed her work."

He said because she loves children, she'll visit schools that bear her name — including an elementary school in Mesa and high school in Glendale — with greater frequency.

"The nation loses one of its best public servants in terms of a role model and teacher," he said. "Arizona gets her back. Maybe in retirement, there will be more Sandra Day O'Connor sightings around the Valley."

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IN HER HONOR: Sandra Day O'Connor attends the unveiling ceremony of a 9-foot bronze statue of her in September 2002 at the Sandra Day O'Connor United States Courthouse in Phoenix.

TRIBUNE FILE