

DISTINGUISHED JUDGES' BIOGRAPHIES

Judge John E. Conway • *By Judge Richard L. Puglisi*



An accomplished athlete, scholar, jet pilot, legislator, lobbyist, and lawyer, John Conway has brought a diverse skill set to the United States District Court for the District of New Mexico where he has served as a district judge for over 27 years. Born in Joplin, Missouri in 1934, John spent the bulk of his formative years in the small town of Paola, Kansas. John's family moved to Paola to be close to grandparents. He was co-captain of Paola High School's first undefeated and untied football team. A record that stands firm today. This was the first among many leadership roles John embraced throughout a varied and colorful career that took him from the steps of Bancroft Hall at the U.S. Naval Academy to the top floor of the U.S. Courthouse in Albuquerque.

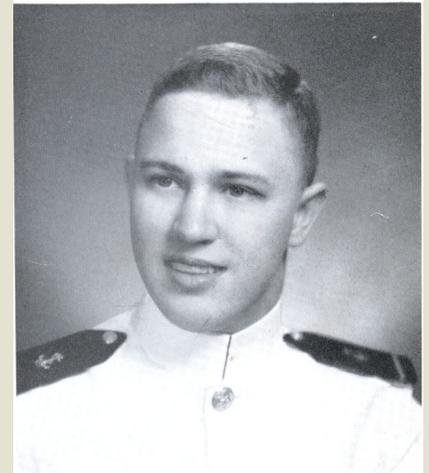
Despite his grandfather's misgivings about attending the U.S. Naval Academy in lieu of a University of Kansas education, John graduated from the Naval Academy in 1956. He continued his football prowess while at the academy and became one of sixteen midshipmen out of 680 in his class to letter in a sport for three years in a row. Upon graduation, John accepted a commission as a 2nd Lieutenant in the U.S. Air Force and ultimately was selected for flight school. When asked why he chose a commission in the Air Force instead of the Navy, John said, "After four years at the Naval Academy, I wanted out of the Navy and stood a better chance of becoming a pilot in the Air Force!" After narrowly being accepted to flight school due to poor eyesight, John flew numerous airplanes, including the B-47, the primary long range bomber for the Air Force at the time.

After his stint in the Air Force that lasted 4 years, 3 months and 12 days, John returned to Kansas to attend Washburn University School of Law where he graduated magna cum laude and first in his class. During law school, John was editor of the Washington Law Journal, a member of Phi Alpha Delta and president of the student bar association.

Upon graduation from law school, John's next move was westward. John had flown all over New Mexico in the Air Force and initially he decided to practice law in Santa Fe, New Mexico. After a few months in Santa Fe, John wanted to return to his small town roots and moved to the small southern New Mexico town of Alamogordo. John acclimated quickly to Alamogordo and began his career as the City Attorney (1966-1972). Thereafter, he practiced law with his partner Charlie Durrett, where he had a wide and varied practice that included cases all over New Mexico. In addition to a thriving law practice, John was elected to the New Mexico legislature, where he was the first Republican to be elected to District 38 in Otero County, New Mexico. Although success as a Republican candidate was a long shot in Otero County, John campaigned door to door, and shook about every hand in the county, sometimes twice. He was the Republican Minority Floor Leader in the Senate from 1973 - 1980. Although he was a Republican, John got along well with Democrats. In fact, his best friend in the New Mexico Senate was Ike Smalley, a conservative Democrat from southern New Mexico, who was the longest serving President Pro tempore in the New Mexico Senate's history. This friendship lasted a lifetime and explains many of the Senate's accomplishments during this time, including legislation that modernized the states' criminal code, the eminent domain code, and the probate code.

After spending almost 15 years practicing law in Alamogordo and 10 of those years in the state legislature, John moved to Albuquerque to join the law firm of Montgomery & Andrews. John relocated to Albuquerque to open the Albuquerque office for the firm as its managing partner. The firm later expanded to over 60 lawyers with offices in Santa Fe, Albuquerque, Farmington, and Los Alamos. Although John resigned from the state senate after joining the Montgomery firm, his resume of public service continued to lengthen. He was Chairman of the New Mexico Judicial Council, member of the National Conference of Commissioners of Uniform State Laws, Chairman of the Disciplinary Board of the New Mexico Supreme Court and Chairman of the Governor's Organized Crime Prevention Commission. Given his knowledge and experience of New Mexico politics and the workings of state government, John was also a sought after lobbyist.

After twenty-three years of practicing law in New Mexico and having tried hundreds of cases throughout the State of New Mexico, John was appointed to the U.S. District Court in Albuquerque by President Ronald Reagan on June 16, 1986. The District of New Mexico is one of the busiest courts in the nation. It was not unusual for John to sentence dozens of felony cases during a single daily sentencing docket. On a particularly busy day in the Las Cruces courthouse, John sentenced 62 admitted felons, a record for the court. During John's tenure as Chief Judge of the district, he is credited with planning the district's two new courthouse projects in Las Cruces and Albuquerque. The new Albuquerque courthouse was opened and dedicated while he was the chief judge. The Las Cruces courthouse was completed and opened in 2010. John is also credited with the increased utilization of magistrate judges in the district and the expansion of the number of magistrate judges from four judges to ten judges (five in Albuquerque and five in Las Cruces). In addition to his regular duties as a district judge, John was also appointed to the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court located Washington D.C. by Chief Justice William Rehnquist, serving from 2003 to 2008. John continues to serve as a senior judge in the Albuquerque Courthouse.



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