

United States District Court  
Western District of Oklahoma

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## **PRESS RELEASE**

**April 27, 2020**

The Western District of Oklahoma Mourns the Death of Senior United States District Judge Lee R. West

It is with great sadness that the United States District Court for the Western District of Oklahoma announces the death of Senior United States District Judge Lee R. West. Judge West died on April 24, 2020, in Muskogee, Oklahoma, at the age of 90.

“Judge West was a wonderful judge, colleague, and friend. He was one of a kind – witty, inquisitive, curious, generous, and incredibly smart. His legal acumen was universally recognized and respected. Gifted with an imposing intellect, he managed to never take himself too seriously. The Court family is deeply saddened by his passing, and we will miss him every day.”

Chief Judge Timothy D. DeGiusti

Judge West was born near Clayton, Oklahoma and raised in Antlers. After high school, he earned a degree in government from the University of Oklahoma and then entered active duty with the United States Marine Corps. He served overseas with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division in Japan and the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division in Korea. After his military service, Judge West returned to Oklahoma and earned his law degree at OU. He was admitted to the Oklahoma State Bar in 1956 and engaged in private practice until 1961 when he became a member of the faculty at the OU College of Law. As a Ford Foundation Fellow in Law, he taught at the “OU of the east,” Harvard Law School, during the 1962-1963 term where he also earned his Master of Laws degree.

Judge West returned to private practice in 1963 and served as a labor arbitrator for the National Mediation Board until Governor Henry Bellmon appointed him to serve as a state court judge for the 22<sup>nd</sup> Judicial District of Oklahoma. Governor Bellmon, a Republican, said since he could not find a Republican in Pontotoc County, “it fell to me to select the least offensive Democrat I could find. And, also, a man who is without peer as a quail hunter.” Burke, Bob & Russell, David L. (2002) *Law & Laughter: The Life of Lee West*. In 1973, President Richard Nixon appointed Judge

West to the Civil Aeronautics Board in Washington, D.C.; he later became Acting Chairman of the Board under President Jimmy Carter. Judge West returned to his beloved Oklahoma in the fall of 1977. Two years later, President Jimmy Carter appointed Judge West to the United States District Court for the Western District of Oklahoma. He served as Chief Judge for the Western District from July 2, 1993 to November 26, 1994, when he assumed senior status. Judge West remained an active member of the bench until November 1, 2019.

In addition to his legal career, Judge West was an avid outdoorsman and a champion breeder and trainer of bird dogs. He served as the president of the Grand National Quail Hunt.

He was preceded in death by his beloved wife of 64 years, Mary Ann. He is survived by his daughters, Kimberly and Jennifer West, and granddaughter, Mary Ellis Passey.

The Court extends its deepest sympathy and condolences to Judge West's family.