

TRIBUTE TO JUDGE EDWARD R. BECKER

JOHN G. ROBERTS, JR.[†]

Judge Edward R. Becker served as a federal judge for almost thirty-six years. He was nominated to the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania by President Nixon in 1970; President Reagan nominated him to the Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit in 1981. He served as Chief Judge of the Third Circuit and a member of the Judicial Conference of the United States from 1998 through 2003.

Judge Becker was a familiar figure around the Supreme Court. For many years, he played piano accompaniment for sing-alongs organized at the Court by Chief Justice Rehnquist. He never used sheet music, but could play just about any song by ear. He had many friends at the Court, and not just Justices and law clerks—he also knew long-time staff members by name. When his colleague on the Third Circuit, Sam Alito, joined the Court in January, Judge Becker immediately offered the services of his long-time judicial assistant to help Justice Alito organize his chambers.

Judge Becker loved his native Philadelphia and, outside of a brief foray to New Haven for law school, spent his life there, most of it living in the house where he grew up. He was one of those rare people who never seemed to be idle and never seemed to run out of energy or ideas. He was unusually engaged and engaging, his personality an improbable combination of bubbly elf and implacable bulldog. The combination made him a delight and extraordinarily effective. His scholarly legal opinions were legendary, and were often cited by the Supreme Court.

One of my last conversations with Judge Becker was indicative of the man. I had been nominated to replace Justice O'Connor, and one of Judge Becker's former clerks was just beginning a clerkship with Justice O'Connor. Judge Becker called me to make certain I would take on his former clerk (Justice Alito later did so). In the midst of all his responsibilities—not to mention his health issues—Judge Becker's concern was for the career of one of his recent clerks.

[†] Chief Justice of the United States.

And he was an energetic and forceful advocate for one of his own!

Judge Becker served his country and the judicial branch of the United States with distinction from the age of thirty-seven until his death. He was an outstanding public servant, a brilliant judge, and a compassionate man known for his warmth and his wit. He will be missed by his colleagues, friends, family, and all those whose lives he touched.