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Contact: Nate Poppino  
Phone: 208-296-9055  
Email: npoppino@idcourts.net

## Idaho Supreme Court Justice John Stegner to Retire

Idaho Supreme Court Justice John R. Stegner will retire from judicial service on Oct. 31, 2023, and eventually return to private practice as an attorney.

[In a letter Monday](#) to Gov. Brad Little, Justice Stegner called retirement a “bittersweet decision” prompted by financial considerations and disparities in pay between judges and many attorneys. “The job requires extraordinary hours to do it well,” Justice Stegner wrote. “In sum, the state is asking judges to do too much for too little.”

Justice Stegner has served Idaho as a judge and justice since 1997, when Gov. Phil Batt appointed him to the district court bench in Latah County. Gov. C.L. “Butch” Otter appointed him to the Idaho Supreme Court in 2018.

Born in Grangeville, the justice grew up in a family attuned to civics and at a time when the U.S. Supreme Court decided issues such as the principle of one person, one vote. Through following such matters, he developed an interest in the importance of the courts, though he once considered a career in education. He attended law school at the University of Idaho and clerked for a federal judge in Boise before developing a civil practice at a legal firm in Lewiston.

“It was always a goal of mine to be on the bench,” Justice Stegner said.

His interest in education continued once he became a judge. Justice Stegner since 2019 has chaired the Idaho Supreme Court Education Committee, where he has helped train numerous judges and collaborated on education projects across the courts.

The justice also became heavily involved with [treatment courts](#), establishing two in Latah County during his time as a district judge. He once performed a wedding for two treatment court graduates and recalls parents approaching him at graduations to say, “Thank you for giving me my child back.” In an [interview last year](#), he described presiding over treatment courts as “the most gratifying work I have done as a judge.”

“Nobody wants to be sued. Nobody wants to sue,” Justice Stegner said. But our court system “enables us to resolve those disputes successfully.”

As Justice Stegner leaves the bench, he said he's concerned by society questioning the legitimacy of America's courts in a way he has never seen. He compared the U.S. system to countries whose court systems don't have the independence to enforce public rights. "If we lose the independence of the judiciary, it's a loss we will never be able to overcome," he said.

He complemented his "wonderful, diligent, hardworking" colleagues on the Supreme Court and shared lessons learned during his career: Don't stoop to match others' contentious behavior and when entering the courtroom, check your ego at the door.

"Justice Stegner brings a principled, deliberate approach to both the appeals we resolve and his vision of what Idaho's courts should be," Chief Justice G. Richard Bevan said. "His drive to better ourselves and our work has improved justice for Idahoans. We wish him the best as he prepares for retirement."

Justice Stegner intends to serve as a senior justice in retirement until any pending appellate cases are resolved. He said he also hopes to work in mediation, resolving disputes before they reach trial.

[Under state law](#), Gov. Little will appoint a justice to replace Justice Stegner from a list of applicants provided by the Idaho Judicial Council. The new justice will serve the rest of Justice Stegner's term, which ends in January 2027. A nonpartisan election for the next six-year term will be held in May 2026.

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