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Chief Justice George Announces He Will Not Seek Re-Election in November 2010

State's Top Jurist to Leave Bench After 38 Years of Service

San Francisco—Chief Justice Ronald M. George today announced that he will not seek re-election as Chief Justice of California in the November 2010 general election. He will conclude his current term of office as Chief Justice on January 2, 2011, after 38 years of service on state courts.

As the 27th Chief Justice of California, Chief Justice George has been instrumental in making historic reforms in the state judicial branch since he took office on May 1, 1996. Noted reforms include (1) the state's assumption of responsibility for funding of the 58 counties' trial courts; (2) the merger of the 220 municipal and superior courts into a single superior court in each county; and (3) the transfer of ownership and governance of the state's 533 courthouses from the counties to the state, under judicial branch management.

As Chair of the Judicial Council of California, the Chief Justice has led major initiatives that have promoted excellence in state court administration and have resulted in reforms in state jury service, foster care, the availability of court interpreters, and court community outreach, as well as improved access to justice for millions of self-represented litigants.

In a statement issued today, Chief Justice George said:

"I have informed Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger that I shall conclude my service as Chief Justice of California with my current term of office, and shall not seek re-election during the approaching filing period. On January 2, 2011, after 38 years' service, including 19 years on the California Supreme Court, I shall leave California's judiciary.

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“It is with enormous gratitude for the privilege and opportunity to serve the people of California that I shall conclude my time in public office.

“My gratitude begins with the four Governors who respectively entrusted me with the responsibility of serving at each level of California’s court system: appointment by Governor Ronald Reagan to the Los Angeles Municipal Court in 1972, Governor Edmund G. Brown, Jr., to the Los Angeles Superior Court in 1977, Governor George Deukmejian to the Court of Appeal in 1987, and Governor Pete Wilson to the Supreme Court as an Associate Justice in 1991 and as Chief Justice in 1996.

“Most of all, I am grateful to have served each day with a group of colleagues — justices and staff alike — unmatched in their judgment, scholarship, professionalism, and collegiality. No person could ask for a more rewarding experience than engaging in a common effort to give meaning to the rule of law by collaboratively crafting judicial opinions which, by the conclusion of my term, will have spanned 50 volumes of the Official Supreme Court Reports, resolving issues important to all Californians and to the nation.

“I take great pride also in achievements on the administrative side of my duties as Chief Justice. It has been a great honor and privilege to lead, for 14 years, what is often recognized as the finest judicial system in the world and — with more than 1700 judges, hundreds of subordinate judicial officers, and 20,000 court employees — perhaps the largest. Heading California’s judicial branch and its efforts to carry out our mission of providing fair and accessible justice to all Californians has been a particularly rewarding experience during these times of great challenge, opportunity, and reform. My gratitude extends literally to thousands of persons — judges, court executives, lawyers and others — for their service on the Judicial Council, on its many advisory committees and task forces, and in the Administrative Office of the Courts, in strengthening the quality, independence, and accountability of our judiciary as a co-equal, separate branch of government.

“Since my appointment as Chief Justice, it has been my responsibility and pleasure to work with three governors — Governor Wilson, Governor Davis, and Governor Schwarzenegger — as well as successive Legislatures, in representing and administering our third branch of government. Each of these three governors, together with legislative leadership and our partners in the justice system, has been instrumental in making California’s court system what it is today, through the adoption and implementation of fundamental structural reforms that followed my visits to the courts in all of California’s 58 counties soon after I became Chief Justice: (1) vesting the responsibility for funding our trial courts in the state instead of the counties, (2) unifying California’s 220 municipal and superior courts into a single level of trial court consisting of one superior court in each county, and (3) transferring ownership of the state’s 533 courthouse facilities from the counties to the state, under judicial branch management. Added to these achievements are dozens of other improvements in our court system. These include jury reform, expanded interpreter services, accommodations for self-represented litigants, the launch of a statewide

case management system, the development of court community outreach programs (including special sessions of the Supreme Court held around the state and focused on student participation), the creation of new judgeships, and an ambitious courthouse construction project to replace or retrofit unsafe facilities.

"My 70th birthday this year focused my attention on a question recently posed by my family: why file for re-election for another 12-year term, after having authored hundreds of judicial opinions and overseen major administrative reforms in the judicial system; what more do you hope to accomplish other than refining and preserving what has been achieved? Reflection convinced me now is the right time — while I am at the top of my game — to leave while the proverbial music still plays, and return to private life.

"It is both difficult and liberating to relinquish a position of responsibility in the public or private arena. I would find it impossible to cut back on what is virtually a daily full-time commitment to administrative and case-related duties. I have often said there are no greener pastures of employment that pose any attraction to me, but the prospect of leisure time devoted to family, reading, and travel is irresistible at this point in my life. Seventy years is not an age too old for a person to occupy the office I hold; at the same time, it is young enough to enable me to pursue the richness of a life outside the law that I relish having before me.

"Despite these considerations, I resolved that I could not in good conscience depart this post if California's judiciary remained enmeshed in a severe budget crisis. But through the tireless and creative efforts of many individuals within and outside the judicial branch, the issues facing the courts have been resolved in a manner that will get us through the difficult budget year that lies ahead, without compromising our ability to provide the public with fair and accessible justice.

"And so, with fourteen years as Chief Justice — and soon reaching the third-longest service among those 27 individuals who since statehood have served in that role — I shall not be filing a declaration of candidacy for re-election during the 30-day period preceding the August 16, 2010 deadline provided by the California Constitution. It is now time for someone else to assume those responsibilities and, as I have done, to build upon the work of his or her predecessors. The Governor accordingly will have the opportunity to nominate, before September 16, 2010, my successor as Chief Justice in accordance with Article VI, section 16, subdivision (d), of the California Constitution.

"It is with an enormous sense of gratitude for the opportunity to serve the people of California that I announce my intention to leave office at the expiration of my current term on January 2, 2011. I do so with complete confidence in Governor Schwarzenegger's commitment to appoint a successor who meets the high standards reflected in the judicial appointments he has made during his tenure as Governor of California."

For biographical information on Chief Justice George, please see <http://www.courtinfo.ca.gov/courts/supreme/justices/george.htm>.

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