



United States Courts for the Ninth Circuit

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NEWS RELEASE

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Ninth Circuit Chief Judge Emeritus Sidney R. Thomas to Take Senior Status

SAN FRANCISCO – Chief Judge Emeritus Sidney R. Thomas, of the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, has informed President Joseph R. Biden, Jr., that he will assume senior status effective upon the appointment of his successor.

In his letter to President Biden, Judge Thomas noted that it has been “a great honor and a privilege to serve as an active judge on the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals for 26 years.” He recently celebrated the 26th anniversary of his appointment to the Ninth Circuit on March 11, 2022.

To date, Judge Thomas has heard 11,550 appeals and authored 406 precedential opinions. He will continue to hear appeals as a circuit judge in senior status.

Judge Thomas, who stepped down as chief judge on Dec. 1, 2021, greatly expanded the use of technology to improve operations and make the judicial process more accessible to the public. He oversaw the improvement of overall court processing times, the onboarding of numerous new judges, the deaths of longtime colleagues, several government shutdowns and budget related crises, numerous natural disasters, the Ninth Circuit’s response to COVID-19 and the effort to maintain the continuity of justice as the courts adapted to virtual proceedings. Judge Thomas served as a member of the Judicial Conference of the United States, which is the governing body for the federal courts, and was appointed by Chief Justice John G. Roberts, Jr., to serve on its Executive Committee.

Judge Thomas was confirmed by the U.S. Senate to serve as a Ninth Circuit judge in 1996. He served as chief judge of the court from Dec. 1, 2014 to Nov. 30, 2021. A native of Bozeman, Montana, Judge Thomas received his Bachelor of Arts from Montana State University in 1975 and his Juris Doctor from the University of Montana School of Law, where he graduated with honors in 1978. Before joining the federal bench, he engaged in private practice in Billings and was an adjunct instructor of law at Rocky Mountain College in Billings.

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit had 9,487 new filings in fiscal year 2021 ending September 30. The court is authorized 29 judgeships and currently has three future vacancies with dates to be determined.

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