



UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
CENTRAL DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

PRESS RELEASE

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PASSING OF THE HONORABLE WILLIAM D. KELLER

The United States District Court for the Central District of California mourns the loss of Senior District Judge William D. Keller, who passed away on Sunday, November 2, 2025 at the age of 91.

In September 1984, Judge Keller was nominated by President Ronald Reagan to serve as a United States District Judge for the Central District of California. On October 3, 1984, he was confirmed by the Senate and received his commission the next day on October 4, 1984. Judge Keller was one of the longest-serving judges in the Central District.

After taking senior status in 1999, Judge Keller remained committed to helping the busy Central District keep up with cases. In 2015, Judge Keller maintained a caseload of around 300 cases and described himself in a news article as a utility player on the Central District's bench. He noted that rather than "going to go surf for the rest of my life," "It's more important to be involved trying cases." He explained that by maintaining his caseload, he was taking "10 cases off the plate of each judge."

Judge Keller's distinguished career is one marked by his commitment to public service. After graduating from the University of California at Berkeley in 1956 with a Bachelor of Science degree, Judge Keller served as a Second Lieutenant in the Armor Branch of the United States Army beginning in January 1957. Judge Keller received an honorable discharge from the Army Reserve in 1960, the same year he received his LL.B. from the UCLA School of Law.

Judge Keller commenced his legal career as an Assistant U.S. Attorney in the Southern District of California in 1961, where he worked for three years before entering private practice as a defense attorney from 1964 to 1971. Judge Keller was appointed twice to the position of U.S. Attorney for the Central District of California from 1972 to 1977, initially by President Richard Nixon, and again when renewed by President Gerald Ford. Judge Keller resumed his work as a defense attorney from 1977 until he took the bench in 1984.

Chief Judge Dolly M. Gee noted that, "in a judicial career spanning 41 years, Judge Keller was a formidable judge who was very devoted to our Court. And those who knew Judge Keller when he was the United States Attorney commented that he ran a fair and ethical prosecutorial office where politics played no role."

"Judge Keller was known for his sense of humor and story-telling ability" shared Darren Nebesar, his long-time career law clerk. Darren adds that "his amiable nature and legendary stories were particularly appreciated by the jurors during the many trials he presided over. Judge Keller was an innovative presence and encouraged his law clerks to approach questions in new and

unconventional ways. He was known by his law clerks and staff as our ‘Fearless Leader,’ a fitting title. His joie de vivre and dynamism will be missed.”

Judge Keller is survived by his three children and many grandchildren.

BRIAN D. KARTH
DISTRICT COURT EXECUTIVE / CLERK OF COURT