



UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
CENTRAL DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

## PRESS RELEASE

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### **PASSING OF THE HONORABLE RONALD S.W. LEW**

The United States District Court for the Central District of California announces the passing of Senior District Judge Ronald S.W. Lew on May 19, 2023. Judge Lew was 81 years old.

Judge Lew was a trailblazer in the legal profession. In February 1987, Judge Lew was nominated by President Ronald Reagan to serve as a United States District Judge for the Central District of California. On May 7, 1987, he was confirmed by the Senate and received his commission the same day. Judge Lew was the first Chinese American appointed to the federal bench outside of Hawaii. Judge Lew assumed senior status in 2006. After taking senior status, he continued to be an active and valuable member of the bench.

Before joining the Court, Judge Lew had a distinguished career. Judge Lew received his undergraduate degree from Loyola Marymount University in 1964 and his law degree from Southwestern Law School in 1971. Judge Lew's legal studies were temporarily interrupted when he served in the U.S. Army from 1967 to 1969. Following law school, from 1972 to 1974, Judge Lew served as a deputy city attorney in the Los Angeles City Attorney's Office. He then spent several years in private practice. During that time, Judge Lew was appointed to serve as commissioner of the Los Angeles Fire and Police Pension Board, where he served from 1976 to 1982. In 1982, Judge Lew was appointed to serve as a judge on the Los Angeles Municipal Court. In 1984, Judge Lew was appointed to serve as a judge on the Los Angeles County Superior Court, where he served until becoming a United States District Judge.

Throughout his career, Judge Lew received many well-deserved honors and awards, including being honored by the Chinese Historical Society of Southern California as one of the Chinese American Pioneers in Law and receiving the Los Angeles Chinese American Museum's Historymakers Award for excellence in law and justice. Judge Lew also devoted his life and career to helping others. In the 1970s, he was integral in establishing the Chinatown Service Center, a Los Angeles-based nonprofit organization that continues to provide essential health and social services to the surrounding communities. He also helped found the Southern California Chinese Lawyers Association in 1975.

Upon learning of Judge Lew's passing, Chief Judge Philip S. Gutierrez shared the following: "At this difficult moment, I will remember Judge Lew's easy smile and warm laugh. In addition to being a dedicated public servant and model jurist, Judge Lew was also a devoted husband, father, and grandfather. Judge Lew approached everything he did with a commitment to hard work and excellence. Judge Lew leaves behind a lasting legacy. We extend our deepest condolences to Judge Lew's family."

“Judge Lew was a wonderful man and a great judge,” expressed Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals Chief Judge Mary H. Murguia. “He was an excellent representative of the district on all Circuit and national matters regarding judicial governance and policy. He will be missed. May he rest in eternal peace.”

“Judge Lew radiated warmth, kindness, strength, and grace,” shared Judge Dean P. Pregerson. Judge George H. Wu said, “Judge Lew was an inspiration for many of us who followed in his footsteps but, equally so, because of his generous heart.”

“Judge Lew was a pillar in the Los Angeles legal community, and especially in the Chinese American community,” said Judge Dolly M. Gee. “He had a prodigious work ethic and a sly sense of humor. He was a mentor to so many, including me, and will be dearly missed.”

Judge Michael W. Fitzgerald shared: “I tried many cases before Judge Lew in the late ‘80s and early ‘90s. Jurors adored him and he was always patient with everyone in the courtroom. When he convicted a bank robbery defendant after a bench trial, the defendant said, ‘Thank you, Your Honor!’” “During the brief time we overlapped on the court, Judge Lew was always kind, warm, and supportive,” expressed Judge Fernando L. Aenlle-Rocha. “I appreciated his advice and collegiality.”

“We are deeply saddened by Judge Lew’s passing and will miss him dearly,” shared Judge Lew’s law clerks, Katie Rubcich and George MacCabe. “Judge Lew brightened our days with his infectious smile, clever jokes, thoughtful advice, and captivating stories. We are so blessed to have had such a brilliant and wonderful mentor, and we are grateful that Judge Lew invested so much time and care into guiding us.”

Judge Lew is survived by his wife of 53 years, Mamie, four children, and many grandchildren.

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**KIRY K. GRAY**  
**DISTRICT COURT EXECUTIVE / CLERK OF COURT**