

Yetka, Lawrence Robert

1924 - 2017

Former Minnesota Supreme Court Justice Lawrence "Larry" R. Yetka passed away peacefully in Cloquet, Minnesota on November 12, 2017 at the age of 93. Larry was born in Cloquet on October 1, 1924 the middle child of Frank and Martha (Norkowski) Yetka. He is survived by a brother, Richard and his son Steven of Florence, Arizona and sister, Alice (Frank) Yetka Byrnes of Portland, Oregon; three sons, Frank (Christine), Lawrence (Lisa) and Christopher (Leslie); four grandchildren, Leah (Bryan) Esterly, David, Benjamin and Katherine; and one great grandchild, Oscar Lawrence Esterly. Larry was preceded in death by his parents and the love of his life and wife of sixty four years, Ellen Marie (Fuller) Yetka. Apart from his family, Lawrence was most proud of being a man of the law and a native son of the City of Cloquet and quite a steward he was.

From an early age, Lawrence was interested in the law. While growing up, he spent many days observing his father's law practice and decided that is what he wanted to pursue as a career despite urging from his father who suggested he become an actuary. After graduating from Cloquet High School as its salutatorian, he worked summers at the Wood Conversion plant to raise money to attend college and law school at the University of Minnesota. There he completed his college degree, finished law school and passed the bar exam in only six years. Upon graduation from law school in 1948 he returned to Cloquet to practice law. Tragically, his father passed away the week after he returned to Cloquet, and one of his first legal duties was handling the Estate. Despite that setback, he was able to grow his private law practice tremendously over the next 25 years until he was appointed to the Minnesota Supreme Court by Governor Wendell Anderson in 1973.

Larry's other professional passion was politics. Starting while he was a student at the University, Lawrence became an active participant in DFL politics and was a founding member of a DFL Club that supported Hubert Humphrey in his first run for Mayor of Minneapolis. From that time on Lawrence became one of Humphrey's closest political friends and advisors. It was that interest in politics that led him to run for the Minnesota state legislature in 1950. He was successfully elected in his first run for office from Carlton County and was a member of the Minnesota House of Representatives from 1951 to 1960. During that entire time he served on the influential Judiciary Committee, the last six years as its Chairman.

He remained very active in DFL politics throughout his legal career up until his appointment to the Court. During that time he served as DFL vice-chairman of the Eighth Congressional District and in that capacity served as the Chair for President John F. Kennedy's visit to Duluth in September 1963. He was a delegate and an instrumental Humphrey floor supporter for the Minnesota delegation at the historic Democratic National Convention in Chicago in 1968.

As Cloquet City Attorney he also worked closely with many of his former legislative colleagues and political allies to advance the interests of Cloquet, Carlton County and the entire northern region of the state. With the assistance of Congressman John Blatnik, followed by Congressman James Oberstar, and friends Bernie Carlson, Wallace Johanson and Freeman Johansen and numerous other state and local dignitaries much was accomplished. He was instrumental in a myriad of greater community projects including the establishment of the Western Lake Superior Sanitary District, the Community Memorial Hospital and the Cloquet Waterline project which allowed the City of Cloquet to obtain a permanent supply of fresh water from Lake Superior to support its growing industrial base.

In 1973 Lawrence was appointed to the Minnesota Supreme Court where he served with distinction for twenty years until his retirement in 1993. During his tenure on the Court, he was instrumental in overseeing the design, construction and completion of the new Minnesota Judicial Law Center and the establishment of the Minnesota Court of Appeals which allowed greater access to the appellate courts for all of the citizens of Minnesota. Because of his many contributions Justice Yetka is also recognized as one of the one hundred most influential jurists in Minnesota State history. After retirement, he returned to Cloquet and volunteered his time to sit as a retired Judge assisting then sitting Judges Dale Wolf and Robert Macaulay, Jr. in Carlton County hearing and handling Conciliation Court matters. He often stated what a wonderful experience it was and that he greatly appreciated all of the help he received from the wonderful staff in Court Administration and its Administrator Bruce Ahlgren.

The family would like to specifically acknowledge the wonderful staff at Diamond Willow Assisted Living and St. Croix Hospice for all that they have done in caring for Larry. We would also like to especially thank all of the physicians and staff at the Raiter Clinic, his friends and the staff at Park Avenue Fitness Club and his personal physicians, Dr. Timothy Kleinschmidt and Dr. Kenneth Ripp for taking such a personal interest in his well-being.

In lieu of flowers we would ask that memorials be made to the Cloquet Education Foundation in the name of the Yetka Family Fund.

Visitation will be Saturday, November 25, 2017 from 10:30 a.m. until the 1:00 p.m. funeral service at Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Cloquet. Interment services will be at Maple Grove Cemetery in Cloquet, followed with refreshments in the church social hall. Arrangements are entrusted to Nelson Funeral Care.

Guestbook:
www.nelsonfuneralcare.net