

Justice Gregory J. Hobbs, Jr.— A Man for All Seasons

by Heidi Ruckriegle, Ben Saver, and Katie Schaefer

*a man of an angel's wit and singular learning . . .
a man of many excellent virtues . . .
where is the man (in whom is so many goodly virtues) of that
gentleness, lowliness, and affability, and as time requires,
a man of marvelous mirth and pastimes. . . —a man for all seasons.
—Robert Whittington, 1520*

Justice Gregory J. Hobbs, Jr. is retiring from his nineteen-year tenure on the Colorado Supreme Court. An expert in water law, Justice Hobbs's distinguished career has gone beyond the role of a lawyer and has touched the lives of many citizens in Colorado and beyond. We thank him for his service and for everything we learned from him.

A Running Start

Gregory James Hobbs, Jr. was the first of his Irish-Catholic parents' five children, born on December 15, 1944, in Gainesville, Florida. Greg Hobbs became a world traveler at an early age, moving frequently because of his father's job in the Air Force. Family,



*Justice Hobbs in his first year as a lawyer,
clerking for Judge William E. Doyle.*

church, and school played important roles in his wandering youth, as did his involvement in the Boy Scouts. He first joined the Boy Scouts when living in territorial Alaska, and he became an Eagle Scout in 1959. During the 1960s, he spent seven summers as a ranger at the Philmont Scout Ranch in New Mexico, where he met Barbara (Bobbie) Hay, whom he would marry in 1967. His scouting experiences introduced him to the charm and beauty of the American West and instilled leadership and public service values that he carried with him throughout his career.



Hobbs went on to earn his undergraduate degree in history at the University of Notre Dame in 1966. In 1967, he briefly attended Columbia University to study Latin American history, before he and his new wife jetted off to serve as Peace Corps volunteers in Bogota, Colombia. When they returned to the United States, Hobbs attended law school at the University of California at Berkeley—Boalt Hall and received his JD degree with honors in 1971.

Early Career

After graduating from law school, Hobbs found himself in search of employment. His first lead did not pan out after he unabashedly inquired into the big firm's lack of a *pro bono* program. To his good fortune, he received an offer from Judge William E. Doyle of the Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals in Denver, and was thrilled to accept the clerkship. During his year as a clerk, he worked on an astonishing fifty-two published opinions (which is not all that surprising to anyone who knows Justice Hobbs's solid work ethic). After his clerkship, he worked for the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) new regional office in Denver as an air pollution enforcement attorney. After two years at the EPA, he

About the Authors

Heidi Ruckriegle is a 2014 graduate of the University of Denver Sturm College of Law—ruckriegle@gmail.com. She looks forward to joining Welborn Sullivan Meck & Tooley this September. Ben Saver is a 2014 graduate of Lewis and Clark Law School—benjamin.saver@gmail.com. He has accepted a fellowship with the Attorney General's Office. Katie Schaefer is a 2014 graduate of the University of California at Berkeley-Boalt Hall—Katie.hannah@gmail.com. She plans to head back to California to work for the Sierra Club. All three served as law clerks to Justice Hobbs in his final year in office, August 2014 to August 2015. The authors are submitting this tribute on behalf of all of Justice Hobbs's law clerks.



Justice Hobbs and wife Bobbie, all smiles on his 70th birthday trip to Chile and Argentina. Here at Petrohue Falls and Osorno Volcano in Chile.



Justice Hobbs and Bobbie at the Pia Glacier along the Chilean Patagonia coast.

joined the Colorado Attorney General's Office, where he helped start and eventually became the head of the Natural Resources Section.

Hobbs left the Attorney General's Office in 1979 to join the Davis, Graham & Stubbs law firm, where he worked under John Sayre, the principal counsel to the Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District (NCWCD), a major water supplier in the region. When Sayre retired in 1986, Hobbs became principal counsel to the NCWCD. In 1992, Hobbs and two other partners left Davis, Graham & Stubbs to establish their own law firm—Hobbs, Trout & Raley—primarily to serve the NCWCD. Hobbs remained with the firm until his appointment to the bench.

Respectable Tenure on the Colorado Supreme Court

From his first month of law school Greg Hobbs knew he wanted to be an appellate judge. He recognized the significance of each opinion-reading assignment and the legacies that case law builds. His interest was later confirmed when he clerked for Judge Doyle, where he was able to see first-hand the high honor of an

appellate judgeship and fully understand the importance of the rule of law. He achieved his goal in April 1996 when Governor Roy Romer appointed him to the Colorado Supreme Court.

Hobbs brought his environmental, transportation, land use, and water law expertise to the deliberations of the state's highest court. Justice Hobbs authored many memorable opinions throughout his tenure, including *People v. Schafer*,¹ where the Court held that people have a reasonable expectation to privacy in tents, and *Webb v. City of Black Hawk*,² where the Court overturned Black Hawk's ban on riding bicycles inside the town's limits. In total, he authored approximately 300 majority opinions for the Court, including thirty-one water decisions.

Justice Hobbs's service to the public extended beyond his role on the bench. During his time on the bench, he helped launch and lead two important ongoing Supreme Court committees. First, in 2003, Justice Hobbs was named by the chief justice to lead the Colorado Access to Justice Commission. At the time, Hobbs stated:

Access to justice is the single most compelling reason for a legal profession. The day we take our oath as attorneys, we swear



Brothers Will Hobbs, Greg Hobbs, and Dan Hobbs, and a string of fish for dinner, at Mary Alice Lake, Weminuche Wilderness.



Justice Hobbs and family visited the Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site, Thanksgiving 2014.



Justice Hobbs working with students and supervising lawyers during a recent Tribal Wills trip to Ramah and Crownpoint, New Mexico.



Justice Hobbs with his trusty and beloved dog, Strider.

never to refuse the cause of the defenseless or the oppressed. A core value of the legal profession is to provide legal services without fee to persons of limited means and organizations serving their needs.

Next, Justice Hobbs also served a pivotal role on the Water Court Committee, initiated in 2007. This committee is charged with reviewing the state's water court system; identifying possible ways through rule and/or statutory change to achieve efficiencies in water court cases while still protecting quality outcomes; and ensuring the highest level of competence in water court participants.

Contributions to the Legal Profession and Community

“Preserve, Conserve, Sustain, and Inspire: these are four great water principles to live by.” This is an oft-repeated mantra of Justice Hobbs. As both a practicing lawyer and sitting Supreme Court judge, Justice Hobbs participated in countless volunteer speaking engagements, the topic of which often was Western water law, his lifelong expertise and passion. Throughout his career, Justice Hobbs also authored numerous articles and several poems in *The Colorado Lawyer* and *The Docket*. He is the author of *In Praise of Fair Colorado: The Practice of Poetry, History and Judging*³ and *Colorado Mother of Rivers, Water Poems*.⁴

But the best of his educational contributions are undoubtedly his water-themed books for CBA-CLE: *The Public's Water Resource—Articles on Water Law, History, and Culture* (2007); *Living the Four Corners: Colorado, Centennial State at the Headwaters* (2010); and *Into the Grand* (2012). With key discussions on various topics, including international water policy, Abraham Lincoln, equal justice under the law, and Native American traditions, these books outline a framework for water law policy and water law history in Colorado.

For more than a decade, Justice Hobbs has served as vice president of the Colorado Foundation for Water Education. Through his speaking engagements and publications, he has fulfilled the mission of this organization—to promote better understanding of Colorado's water resources and issues. In 2004, he authored the Foundation's first publication, the *Citizen's Guide to Colorado Water Law*,⁵ which continues to provide Coloradans balanced and accurate information on a variety of subjects related to water resources, including timely updates. Recently, Justice Hobbs helped organize the Foundation's first Water Fluency Program, which will educate people who deal with water issues during the course of their work.



Law clerks from the past nineteen years gather to celebrate Justice Hobbs's retirement and give him a proper send-off to his next adventures!

A Uniting Voice on Behalf of Native Americans

Although he is best known for his work regarding Colorado water law, Justice Hobbs has contributed significantly to other endeavors throughout his time on the Court. In 2014, Governor John Hickenlooper created the Sand Creek Massacre Commemoration Commission to raise awareness about the tragedy at Sand Creek in 1864, when Colorado cavalry volunteers serving in the U.S. Army massacred more than 200 Cheyenne and Arapahoe villagers living peacefully near Fort Lyon. The governor appointed Justice Hobbs to the Commission, where he joined representatives from tribal, federal, and local governments, as well as historians, scholars, and religious leaders, to examine the massacre's modern-day relevance, give voice to the stories of the descendants of the massacre, and educate the public. To commemorate the 150th anniversary of the massacre, Justice Hobbs gave a stirring speech at the Sand Creek remembrance ceremony in front of the State Capitol building on December 3, 2014, after the Governor delivered a long-awaited official apology to the Native Americans on behalf of the State of Colorado.

As one of the founders of University of Denver Law School's (DU Law) Tribal Wills Project, Justice Hobbs has been instrumental in building a program for law students to provide volunteer legal services for tribal members in the Four Corners region. He has remained active as an advisor for the program and meets with participating law students to explain the importance of the work they perform for the tribes and the history and culture of the communities the students will serve, as well as to share his experiences from his travels to the region. His excitement for the program is unbridled: "To be of help to others who really need it! To learn by contributing to these unique communities on their own ground face to face!" Just this May, he joined the DU Law student volunteers in Ramah and Crownpoint, New Mexico, an experience he treasures.

Mentoring Law Clerks

During his career on the bench, Justice Hobbs has mentored fifty-six law clerks (one lucky clerk served with him for two years). Most of these lawyers arrived to his chambers fresh out of law school and likely somewhat skittish going into their first post-graduate job. By the end of that first day, however, the consensus among law clerks is that you could not ask for a better first-year boss and mentor.

Justice Hobbs fostered a uniquely open dialogue with his clerks, expressing genuine interest in hearing their opinions, whether it be about a pending case before the Court or the best places to go camping in Colorado. The respect he demonstrated for his law clerks is unparalleled. When he challenged their research or writing, it was not because he questioned the work—it was because he knew how to push the clerks to continually improve. In his chambers, collaboration was always the focus. Law student interns



Law clerks and Justice Hobbs take a rafting trip down Brown Canyon in early spring.

worked closely with the clerks and were encouraged to participate as equal peers in an environment where their thoughts were heard and their work was truly appreciated. Justice Hobbs believes this teamwork mentality served the court well, but it also provided his clerks the opportunity to learn from his own first-hand experience and wealth of earned knowledge, as well as from the insights of their fellow clerks.

Alumni of Justice Hobbs's chambers fill positions in respected law firms, state and local government, and nonprofit organizations throughout the West—demonstrable evidence of his broad influence and inspiration. We all keep in mind the public interest values reinforced during our year with Justice Hobbs, and strive to not simply be good lawyers, but also good community members and citizens.

As we reflect on the life and career of Gregory J. Hobbs, Jr., we cannot help but simultaneously look forward to his next chapter with joyful wonder. Words alone cannot describe the thanks we owe, but we hope to demonstrate our gratitude by paying forward the honor and integrity Justice Hobbs instilled in us early in our careers.

Justice Hobbs often ends his public speeches with a photograph of a petroglyph at Mesa Verde—a human hand engraved into the rock more than 1,000 years ago. He translates this message from Colorado's first people into universal words that are also fitting for his retirement from the Colorado Supreme Court: "Hello, goodbye, and good luck!"

Notes

1. *People v. Schaefer*, 946 P.2d 938 (Colo. 1999).
2. *Webb v. City of Black Hawk*, 295 P.3d 480 (Colo. 2013).
3. Hobbs, *In Praise of Fair Colorado: The Practice of Poetry, History and Judging* (Bradford Publishing Co., 2004).
4. Hobbs, *Colorado Mother of Rivers, Water Poems* (Colorado Foundation for Water Education, 2005).
5. Hobbs, *Citizen's Guide to Colorado Water Law* (Colorado Foundation for Water Education, 2004), www.colorado.edu/geography/class_home/pages/geog_4501_s14/readings/CG-Law2004.pdf. ■