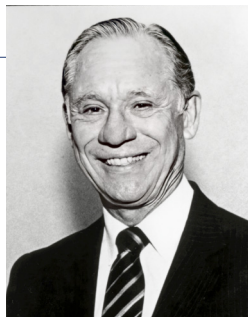


## Justice John A. Arguelles

### 1927–2022

**B**ORN IN LOS ANGELES in 1927, John Arthur Arguelles entered the United States Navy near the end of World War II. Following his discharge, he earned both his undergraduate degree in economics and his J.D.



from UCLA. He served on the Los Angeles Municipal and Superior courts, the California Court of Appeal, Second Appellate District, Division 4, and finally on the California Supreme Court, where he was an associate justice, and the second Latino to sit on the court, from 1987 to 1989.

He and his wife Martha, who predeceased him, had three children. Justice Arguelles died on April 10, 2022, at the age of 94.

On December 7, 2022, the California Supreme Court convened a special memorial session, presided over by then-Chief Justice Tani Cantil-Sakauye, honoring Justice Arguelles. Three former colleagues spoke. The full transcript will eventually be published in the Court's *Official Reports*. The version presented below has been edited for length and clarity.

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**CHIEF JUSTICE CANTIL-SAKAUYE:** Good morning, welcome to oral argument. This is a special day because oral argument will be preceded by a memorial for our colleague, Supreme Court Justice John A. Arguelles. We have three speakers with us, and we are welcoming them today. We'll begin with Robert Loewen, former partner at Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher.

**ROBERT LOEWEN:** Justice Arguelles joined Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher as counsel in 1989 when he retired from this bench, and that was an unusual designation in those days, but he was a pretty unusual guy. We quickly became friends. Lawyers young and old started coming to John for his wisdom and advice. I especially liked to discuss complex questions of legal ethics, a subject on which he was both knowledgeable and wise.

I also sought his advice on appellate practice. One time I was writing an appellate brief, and I was concerned there was a precedent that may not get enough consideration of important differences and probably to the benefit of my opponent. John said, "You need to bend the twig." I must have looked puzzled because he explained the metaphor: "A bush that grows near the sea often leans away from the prevailing wind," he said. John shared his own experience as a judge where he had

been persuaded to view a certain case differently than it might first appear. "The lawyers in those cases began by presenting the facts in a way that made me lean in the direction of their argument," he said. They bent the twig. Once he saw the facts from their perspective, it was easy for them to point out the distinction that they wanted to make.

**CHIEF JUSTICE CANTIL-SAKAUYE:** Thank you, Mr. Loewen, for those memories and the wisdom of Justice Arguelles. We next invite Presiding Justice Manuel Ramirez of the Court of Appeal, Fourth Appellate District, Division Two. Good morning.

**PRESIDING JUSTICE MANUEL RAMIREZ:** Madam Chief, good morning. Members, honorable members of this court, good morning. Thank you very much, Chief, for inviting me to join you in this celebration of life of our former colleague and dear friend.

To properly recognize Justice Arguelles, I would like to share two views of him, the professional view, with which many here are familiar, and a personal view. My view of my relationship with someone I consider to be a great, wonderful gentleman. Someone who, in all aspects of his life, was elegant, dignified, and the model of civility. As I reflected on Justice Arguelles' legal career, which spanned many, many decades, I am reminded

of the words spoken by Oliver Wendell Holmes, "Continuity with the past is a necessity, it is not a duty." And so, appraisal and a highlight of Justice Arguelles' past tells us many things. Justice Arguelles served in the United States Navy in 1945, 1946, and he was honorably discharged. He graduated from the University of California, Los Angeles in 1950, received his Juris Doctorate from UCLA School of Law in



Presiding Justice Manuel Ramirez. Photo: California Courts.

1954, and was admitted to the State of California Bar in 1955. During eight years of private practice, he was a registered legislative advocate in Sacramento.

Later, he was president of the East Los Angeles Montebello Bar Association, a founding member of the Mexican American Bar Association, and a Montebello city councilman, elected to that position in April 1962 by the then-largest vote in the history of the city of Montebello. In December 1963, just before he was to begin serving as mayor, he was appointed to the Municipal Court, East Los Angeles District, by Governor Edmund G. "Pat"



*From left: Justices Armand Arabian, John Arguelles, and Edward Panelli, and Chief Justice Ronald George. Photo: Greg Verville.*

Brown. Governor Ronald Reagan then appointed him to the Los Angeles County Superior Court in September of 1969. While a Superior Court judge, Justice Arguelles was an executive board member and a vice president of the California Judges Association. And from 1977 to 1979, he was a member of the California Judicial Council. In May 1984, after almost 21 years on the trial bench, Governor George Deukmejian appointed him as an Associate Justice on the Second District Court of Appeal. Three years later, in March of 1987, Governor Deukmejian appointed him to the California Supreme Court, where he served as an associate justice until March of 1989.

Justice Arguelles chaired and co-chaired two, in my opinion, landmark Judicial Council committees that studied the language needs of non-English-speaking persons. He was appointed to that position by Chief Justice Donald Wright to chair the committee that started its studies in 1975 and concluded in 1977. That committee continues to this day and now oversees the following language access metrics: Spanish, Vietnamese, Mandarin, Cantonese, Korean, Punjabi, Russian, Arabic, Farsi, Tagalog, and many, many others, as well as the Certified Court Sign Language Interpreters Program. Imagine that. That was the committee he started. It is the most extensive interpreter program, Chief, as you know, in the entire world.

Justice Arguelles' judicial career was noteworthy, as having served at four court levels, the municipal court, the superior court, the Court of Appeal, and the Supreme Court. Even more telling, however, in my opinion, is the fact that he was appointed four times by three very different governors of both major political parties. I celebrate his judicial career by recognizing his generosity of spirit, his compassion, and his faith in his fellow Americans, which he exemplified in his own very unique manner in mentoring me and inspiring others.

I made my way through college on a really difficult and different road. And throughout that entire time, I

was guided by Justice Arguelles. Now, you may all be thinking, why am I, as the presiding justice of the Court of Appeal in Riverside, talking about someone who worked, lived, and grew up in Los Angeles and later in Orange County? So as trial lawyers have said to all of us, bear with me, Your Honor, I'll connect the dots in just a moment, very briefly.

I grew up in a family of 10, where we were long on love but very, very short on money. As the oldest male in a Mexican American family, I worked throughout my high school years to help out my family. But between work and school activities, my grades suffered. And I wasn't admitted to a traditional four-year school. Consequently, I enrolled in the evening program at East Los Angeles Junior College. That decision allowed me to work full time from 6 o'clock in the morning to 3 o'clock in the afternoon, which, in turn, gave me the opportunity to attend classes at East Los Angeles Junior College from 4 to 10 p.m., unless I had a chemistry or biology lab, in which case it would be 4 to 11 pm. I carried a full load the entire time of 20 units.

Because it was so unlikely that a night student working full time could graduate in three semesters and maintain a 3.5 grade point average, the dean of discipline called me into his office. He was concerned that something unusual had happened. After reviewing extensively my transcripts and offering me one of the warmest congratulations I have ever received, Dean Butcher did something that literally set the course of my life. He contacted Justice Arguelles and told him that he had someone in his office that he wanted him to meet. I spoke with Justice Arguelles in Dean Butcher's office on the phone, and Justice Arguelles told me to contact him two years later when I graduated from college. I did, and he invited me to the courthouse in Pomona to meet with him for lunch. There, he introduced me to many of his colleagues, including Judge Carlos Teran and Judge Charles Vogel. Inspired by that meeting, I decided to go to law school, and from that meeting, I walked away with almost 15 or 16 letters of recommendation from all of the judges who were in the lunchroom at the time that meeting took place.

Justice Arguelles continued to mentor me after I graduated from Loyola and began my career as a deputy district attorney. He took an interest in my career, and he advised me on all my assignments. When I was appointed to the municipal court by Governor Deukmejian in 1983, Justice Arguelles was there to administer the oath of office, and the same for superior court in Orange County. Seven years later, I stood before the Judicial Nominees Evaluation Commission for a confirmation to the Court of Appeal, and Justice Arguelles, now retired from the California Supreme Court, was there to speak on my behalf. Throughout my entire career as an attorney and on the bench, Justice Arguelles was there. He continued to guide me and provide me with his counsel.

I am so fortunate and so blessed to be able to call him my friend, my mentor.

I would, in closing, submit to each of you that Justice Arguelles was a man of his generation, rightly called the greatest generation. Born in 1927, living as a child and teenager through the Great Depression, joining the Navy while still a teenager, rising to community service and leadership as an adult, Justice Arguelles was a leader in that generation which brought this country to the fulfillment of its destiny. As was said of John Adams, a leader of another generation, so too with Justice Arguelles. "From fancy's dreams to active virtue turn, let freedom, friendship, faith, thy soul engage and serve like them, thy country, and thy age." Justice Arguelles possessed each of those three wonderful virtues. His soul engaged in freedom in his many published appellate and Supreme Court opinions and his vital and important contributions as a Judicial Council member. His entire professional career was tirelessly dedicated and relentlessly committed to the improvement of our system of administration of justice. God bless him and may he rest in peace. Again, I thank you all for the privilege to stand before you and pay tribute to a very dear and special former member of our profession, a member of this court, and my dear friend, Justice Arguelles. Thank you, Chief.

CHIEF JUSTICE CANTIL-SAKAUYE: Thank you, Presiding Justice Ramirez. Next, we invite the Honorable Marvin R. Baxter, Associate Justice, Supreme Court of California, retired. Welcome. We miss you. How odd it is to see you on the other side.

JUSTICE MARVIN R. BAXTER, RET.: Well, good morning, Chief and Associate Justices. May it please the court.

My relationship with John Arguelles was formed through his appointments to the Second District Court of Appeal in 1984 and the California Supreme Court in 1987. My job at the time was the appointment secretary, and my responsibility was to investigate and evaluate applicants for executive and judicial appointments and to recommend those most worthy to the governor. After doing so for these judicial positions, I concluded that on a scale of 1 to 10, John Arguelles was a 10. His reputation as a highly regarded and experienced trial judge was clear, having served six years on the Los Angeles Municipal Court appointed by Governor "Pat" Brown and 15 years on the Los Angeles Superior Court through appointment by Governor



Justice Marvin Baxter.  
Photo: California Courts.

Ronald Reagan. It was also apparent that his background contributed greatly to his outstanding personal attributes and his proven ability to relate extremely well with others. Simply stated, he was a man of the people. Born in 1927 and raised in East Los Angeles during the Great Depression, when things were really tough, he held odd jobs to help support his family, and he served in the U.S. Navy after graduating from high school.

Once honorably discharged and with the help of the GI Bill, he fulfilled his dream of earning undergraduate and law degrees from his beloved UCLA. After being admitted to the California Bar in 1955, John entered private law practice in East Los Angeles and, in his own words, specialized in anything that walked through the door. The opportunities in the law for women and minorities were severely limited, especially at that time, but John persevered and overcame the obstacles and earned an excellent reputation as a lawyer and as a community leader. He represented people with everyday legal problems, some trade associations at legislative hearings in Sacramento, was one of the founding members of the Mexican American Bar Association of Los Angeles and served as a member of the Montebello City Council, among other accomplishments.

That success, that exposure, and the respect that he earned from across the political aisle led to an outstanding 26-year judicial career with service at every level of California's judicial system. I must admit that Governor Deukmejian was very well acquainted with John and was fully aware of his impressive background and reputation. So I must acknowledge that my research and my recommendations were simply icing on the cake when the governor elevated Judge Arguelles to California's appellate and Supreme Courts. My only regret is that my tenure on the Supreme Court did not overlap with that of Justice Arguelles. He was a seasoned jurist with a wonderful down-to-earth personality, always willing to consider the views of others with an open mind.

We stayed in touch with one another over the years. As recently as a week or so before he passed, we had a conversation. He would often mention his love and affection and appreciation of Martha and their children and considered them his greatest source of happiness and inspiration. His parting words during our final conversation were that he was grateful for having lived such a long, good and fulfilled life. We're all grateful for his significant contributions to the administration of justice in California, and for those fortunate enough to have known John personally, the memories of his friendship and his grace and his courtesy will live on. Thank you very much.

CHIEF JUSTICE CANTIL-SAKAUYE: Thank you, Justice Baxter. The Supreme Court thanks all of the speakers today for such a profile of a great man. ★