

APPENDIX

CHIEF JUSTICE JOHN A. SPEZIALE 1922–2005

The Honorable John A. Speziale, who had a fifty year career in public service and was one of the few Connecticut citizens to have served in all three branches of state government, died on January 3, 2005, at the age of eighty-two. In addition to holding a variety of judicial appointments, Justice Speziale served in the legislature as a clerk for the General Assembly Judiciary Committee in 1949, and was elected to executive office as State Treasurer from 1959 to 1961.

Justice Speziale was born in Winsted on November 21, 1922, and graduated from Torrington High School in 1940. He received his B.A. degree from Duke University in 1943, and earned his J.D. from Duke University School of Law in 1947. He served with the United States Naval Reserve from 1942 to 1946 in the Pacific Theater during World War II as a lieutenant.

Following the war, Justice Speziale was admitted to the Connecticut bar in 1948. He was engaged in the private practice of law from 1948 to 1961, when he began his judicial service, and again from 1984, when he retired from public life, until his death in 2005. He also served as a municipal court judge in Torrington from 1949 to 1951, an attorney for the federal Office of Price Stabilization from 1951 to 1952, a member of the Connecticut State Judicial Council from 1955 to 1959, and city attorney for Torrington from 1957 to 1959.

In 1961, Justice Speziale began his state judicial career when he was appointed to the Court of Common Pleas. Thereafter, in 1965, he became a judge of the Superior Court, which he came to lead as the Chief Judge from 1975 to 1977. Subsequently, he served as the Presiding Judge of the Appellate Session of the Superior Court from 1975 to 1977. Justice Speziale was elevated to the Connecticut Supreme Court in 1977, where he served as an associate justice. In 1978, Justice Speziale was selected as the Chief Court Administrator of the judicial branch and served in that position until 1981. On November 12, 1981, he was nominated as the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court and served until resigning from that position on November 21, 1984, at the age of sixty-two, to return to the private sector.

During his seven and one-half years as a justice on the Supreme Court, Justice Speziale participated in the

deliberations and dispositions of 591 cases that were argued to the court. He authored 152 majority opinions, three concurring opinions and six dissenting opinions. On November 6, 1984, at a ceremony marking Justice Speziale's retirement from the Connecticut Supreme Court, Justice Ellen A. Peters remarked that many of those opinions have "changed the legal landscape of the State of Connecticut. John Speziale's keen sense of justice is manifest in his opinions on the law of criminal procedure. An early dissenting opinion exposed problems with our system of plea bargaining. Another major opinion addressed the integrity of jury deliberations. Other cases in the criminal law dealt carefully with the sensitive issues that surround the validity of confessions and the legality of searches.

"But justice is, of course, not confined to the proper resolution of questions of criminal law. And so John Speziale wrote during his time on the Court opinions: guaranteeing a debtor a right to a fair hearing before his property could be taken by foreclosure; assuring electors that absentee ballots would be fairly administered; and promising litigants in family disputes that they would have a full judicial consideration of their personal and property rights. Other landmark cases gave notice of his and the Court's commitment to the principles of case flow management. Finally during the last Court year the Chief Justice led the Court to new formulations of the conflicting rights of privacy and the press and of the role of the legislature and the judiciary in the impeachment process.

"This is a record of significant achievement which all of us on the bench aspire to emulate. It reflects the understanding that Supreme Courts in a democratic society have a dual role—the adjudication of legal disputes and the development of legal rules. It is the latter role, the development of legal rules, that is essential to the sound growth of a reasoned legal system. . . . [T]he judicial opinions which give us guidance for the future are those which, like those of John Speziale, search for principles, articulate guidelines, and thus confront the underlying issues."

Justice Speziale was also greatly respected and admired by the members of the state bar for dedicating himself to creating a harmonious relationship between the bench and the bar for the benefit of the public. On the occasion of Justice Speziale's retirement from the Supreme Court, Attorney Raymond Beckwith, the president of the

Connecticut Bar Association, offered the following praise: “Chief Justice Speziale fully recognized the position of lawyers in our judicial system and frequently called upon the organized bar to assist in various projects. He sought the advice of the bar most recently on such matters as establishment and rules for the Appellate Court, judicial evaluation of Judges and control of court dockets. Chief Justice Speziale is a towering figure in the history of Connecticut law and his efforts to bring the law to the people of the State as efficiently and expeditiously as possible will not soon be forgotten.”

During his tenure as Chief Court Administrator, Justice Speziale was directly responsible for numerous radical changes within the judicial branch. He pushed for the merging of the Court of Common Pleas and the Superior Court into a unified court system. He worked tirelessly for the creation of the state’s intermediate Appellate Court. He lobbied for an increase in the number of trial judges as well and their salaries in order to attract and to retain able lawyers for the judiciary. In addition, the quality of judicial performance was enhanced by the expanded educational programs available to the trial judges and by systematic performance review. Justice Speziale also established the attorney trial referee program with the goal of eliminating the litigation backlog in the court system. Under Justice Speziale, Connecticut became a national model for how to expedite case flow. Justice Speziale also emphasized the appointment of women to judicial positions, as he appointed the state’s first female prosecutor, Anne C. Dranginis, later a judge on the Connecticut Appellate Court.

Throughout his distinguished legal and judicial career, Justice Speziale also served as a member of the following committees and organizations: Executive Committee of the National Conference of State Trial Judges, Judicial Review Council, American Bar Association, Executive Committee of the Superior Court, Chairman of the Connecticut Planning Commission on Criminal Administration, Commission on Adult Probation, Advisory Council on Court Unification, Board of Pardons, Commission on Official Legal Publications, Connecticut Bar Association, Litchfield County Bar Association, Institute of Judicial Administration, Connecticut Justice Commission, American Judicature Society, American Bar Foundation, Chairman of the State-Federal Relations Commission of the Conference of Chief Justices, Supreme Court Historical Society, Lawyers

Committee of the National Center for State Courts, and Attorney Trial Referee.

In addition to his judicial duties, Justice Speziale was very active in politics and local community affairs with the following organizations: St. Peter Church, Board of Directors of Newington Children's Hospital, Trustee of Connecticut Junior Republic Knights of Columbus, American Federation of Musicians, Order of the Sons of Italy in America, Litchfield County University Club, Torrington Country Club, Connecticut State Seniors Golf Association and Bear Lakes Country Club of West Palm Beach.

Justice Speziale, a devoted family man, was survived by his wife of sixty years, Mary Kocsis Speziale, and their children, John A. Speziale, Jr., and Marcia Jean Speziale, as well as two grandchildren.

The legacy of Justice Speziale was summed up by Chief Justice William J. Sullivan in the following statement: "For over 50 years he was an outstanding lawyer and jurist who brought great honor and respect to the legal profession. People of Justice Speziale's stature are irreplaceable."

On January 5, 2005, Judge Anne Dranginis, a longtime friend of Justice Speziale, delivered the following eulogy at his funeral. "For nineteen years, John Speziale hosted a Christmas luncheon at his beloved Venetian Restaurant almost across the street, for all the judges then serving in the Litchfield judicial district, most often Jed Pickett, Charlie Gill, Dick Walsh and I. He met the new judges, like Randy DiPentima, and kept up with his old friends, like Roy Daly. We 'talked shop' and of course, about the old days. About the Peter Reilly case, and the upstart young woman lawyer in the mid-70s who applied for the state's attorney's job, after John Bianchi's untimely death. We shared a martini and he and I would order baccala and polenta, specially made for the holidays by Fiorita and Michael DiLullo. Of course, 'the judge of the people' as he called probate Judge Joe Gallicchio, rounded out the table.

"Yesterday morning Joe and I talked about how hard it was to believe that John Speziale had retired from the bench that long ago.

"It is with sadness at his loss that we come together today, but it is also a time to celebrate his fabulous life. He was a visionary, an icon, and a giant in the law of our recent history. The justices of the Supreme Court, the judges of the Appellate

Court and Superior Court join in this tribute to a great leader. The members of the bar who join with us today know the dedication and excellence that defined him and which was expected of them as they appeared before him, or worked with him to improve justice. As with many of you here, in my public life, I will miss his wise counsel in the important decisions of my life.

“It is also a day to celebrate a loyal and loving man, who was a wonderful husband, father, grandfather, mentor, and friend to all of us in this church. Yes, we all know, John and Marcia, that he was a worrywart, and that he may well have driven you a bit crazy at times . . . and Mary the tales you must have heard! He was, as his long-time secretary, Barbara Bongiolatti said last night, a very private person . . . and I would add . . . in a very public job.

“John Speziale was always serious . . . as a young student, as a member of the ‘greatest generation’ doing his duty in the pacific theatre in World War II, as a law student at Duke . . . and maybe too serious about such things as his musical talent Mary agreed that he played with the big bands at Duke, but just perhaps he wasn’t as accomplished at the clarinet as at his studies!

“It was not unusual for members of our armed services to return home after seeing the world at war. John Speziale came back to the place of his roots. He came home after law school to care for family, friends, and his community. Over time that community just got larger and larger.

“‘Don’t dillydally, vote for Speziale’ was his playful theme when he ran and won the office of Treasurer of the state of Connecticut. We might giggle today at that phrase, the simplicity, the purposefulness of it. But it gave us a window into not only his public formality, but also his private elfishness . . . that little glint in his eyes, that was part of who he was as well. He never did ‘dillydally.’ He was always busy, always involved, always caring . . . even to the end. His sense of duty and his love of people naturally led him into public service, in the legislative and executive branches of government. His love of the law led him to the bench.

“He was a judge for quite a while before he tried the Peter Reilly case. But it was in that case, in the petition for a new trial, that he became the ‘poster boy’ of the trial judge as he wrote his opinion on the kitchen table . . . alone, handling a most controversial and divisive issue . . . a moment in

time, when character is tested, courage displayed, enemies made. There was no time for playfulness in this instance, and the glint became a steely glare. For Judge Speziale, a 'grave injustice' had been done, and there was nothing to do but put his body, mind, reputation and career on the line, so that all of us can enjoy the ultimate benefit of this great nation . . . justice first, last, and always. Few of us on the bench ever are asked to be that alone.

"But that is only part of his story as part of our history of the Connecticut courts. His administrative leadership changed 200 years of court history in six years . . . that's about how long it took him to finally convince the governor, the legislators, and indeed his colleagues on the Superior Court bench that we should have a single tier trial court system. That change occurred in 1978. By 1983, he saw the establishment of the Connecticut Appellate Court. We just celebrated our 20th anniversary this past October, and dedicated that celebration to him. Former Chief Judge Antoinette 'Billie' Dupont remembered Justice Speziale as her champion, even after he had left the bench. And he was proud of her fourteen years of leadership on the Appellate Court.

"His work as an administrator was the culmination of an effort that brought the Connecticut judicial branch into the 20th century and prepared it for the 21st.

"How lucky we were to have had him at the right place at the right time. Although every chief justice has contributed uniquely in his or her own way, considering the time allotted to each, and the enormity of some tasks, but John Speziale has to be, in retrospect, pound for pound, and punch for punch . . . the best that ever stepped into the judicial ring as the 'C.J.,' which means undisputed champion judge. He was able to take his vision, translate it from experience into workable plans, and use his considerable political skills to make it happen. In that rough and tumble world, he was a heavyweight.

"And perhaps that is why we think of him as still being so 'present' to us and with us. His forward thinking, his modern approach is alive and well in the Connecticut courts and has been the model for other court systems around this great country. When his portrait was unveiled in the Supreme Court, he was honored by the national center for state courts. We were the beneficiaries of his world view of how courts could be relevant in the modern world.

“His belief in the value of mediation, and his work after retirement have been a model for alternative dispute resolution for which the Connecticut Bar Association has honored him with an ADR symposium in his name. He told me recently ‘if people were honest and sincere we could settle the case.’ He took great pride in that. He also bragged that they waited in line to see him, with a little laugh to follow. Even in retirement, Speziale did not dillydally.

“In one of our last visits, when it was obvious to him that the end was near, he told me ‘life is what it is.’ I know he was eager for more, to give more, to watch the next step, to be part of the game. He smiled, and said there had been ‘so many problems and sadness, but ever so much more joy.’

“He was joyful in his work, which is why he worked so hard. He felt joy at his accomplishments, which were many. He enjoyed his golf, his friends, Rhode Island, Florida . . . his was such a full life.

“His most treasured joy was his family. Mary, last Tuesday he said he didn’t know where you got the strength . . . you all gave him the final gift of Christmas at home. For sharing John with all of us, thank you.

“We grieve our loss today, but it would not serve his memory for us to do anything more than to go out there and dive into the ring . . . and fight the good fight . . . to insist on preparation and dedication, and in all cases to do only the proper things, even if it is unpopular . . . to stand up for justice.

“So don’t dillydally, emulate John Speziale.”
