

# Supreme Decision

## Retirement sets up a big battle this summer

John Paul Stevens, age 90, is the oldest member of the U.S. Supreme Court. He has been an Associate Justice for more than 34 years, serving during all or part of seven U.S. presidencies.

Justice Stevens could remain on the Court for as long as he lives, but he has decided to retire in June. The news sets up what will likely be a major political battle this summer over who will be his replacement.

U.S. Presidents nominate Supreme Court Justices, and the U.S. Senate must **confirm** or reject the nominees. Finding someone like the independent-minded Justice Stevens will be tough. He started on the Court with conservative views, which became liberal over the years. He has voted with

conservatives on issues including indecent speech. But he has sided with liberals on issues like school prayer.

Liberals want a liberal to replace Stevens. Conservatives want a conservative. Some women want another woman to join the two women on the Court. Democrats are urging President Barack Obama to name someone who has never been a judge before.

Picking a Supreme Court Justice is a very important decision. Justices can serve for life. Their legal rulings affect how we live for many years, even after they retire or die, and for long after the Presidents who picked them leave office. For instance, the segregation of U.S. schools was outlawed after the Court's 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. The Justices who made that decision are no longer alive, but the impact of their ruling lives on.

—Laura Egodigwe



**Anthony M. Kennedy**  
Associate Justice  
**Hometown:** Sacramento, California  
**Views:** Moderate to Conservative  
**Nominated by:** President Ronald Reagan, a Republican  
**What May Surprise You:** From age 11 to 16, he worked after school as a page for the California State Senate.

**Samuel A. Alito Jr.**  
Associate Justice  
**Hometown:** Trenton, New Jersey  
**Nominated by:** President George W. Bush, a Republican  
**Views:** Conservative  
**What May Surprise You:** In his college yearbook, he wrote he would become a Supreme Court Justice.

**John Paul Stevens**  
Associate Justice  
**Hometown:** Chicago, Illinois  
**Nominated by:** President Gerald Ford, a Republican  
**Views:** Moderate to Liberal  
**What May Surprise You:** When he was a kid, he met the famous aviators Amelia Earhart and Charles Lindbergh.

**Ruth Bader Ginsburg**  
Associate Justice  
**Hometown:** New York, New York (Brooklyn)  
**Views:** Liberal  
**Nominated by:** President Bill Clinton, a Democrat  
**What May Surprise You:** She played cello and was a cheerleader in high school. She and Justice Scalia are good friends. They and their spouses celebrate each New Year's Eve together.

**John G. Roberts Jr.**  
Chief Justice  
**Hometown:** Long Beach, Indiana  
**Views:** Conservative  
**Nominated by:** President George W. Bush, a Republican  
**What May Surprise You:** He was captain of his high-school football team.

**Stephen G. Breyer**  
Associate Justice  
**Hometown:** San Francisco, California  
**Views:** Liberal  
**Nominated by:** President Bill Clinton, a Democrat  
**What May Surprise You:** He is an Eagle Scout and speaks French fluently.

**Antonin Scalia**  
Associate Justice  
**Hometown:** New York, New York (Queens)  
**Views:** Conservative  
**Nominated by:** President Ronald Reagan, a Republican  
**What May Surprise You:** He has nine kids (five sons and four daughters) and is known for his sense of humor. He and Justice Ginsburg are good friends who share a love of opera. They even appeared in an opera together once as extras.

**Sonia Sotomayor**  
Associate Justice  
**Hometown:** New York, New York (Bronx)  
**Nominated by:** President Barack Obama, a Democrat  
**Views:** Liberal  
**What May Surprise You:** The first Hispanic Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court loved to read the Nancy Drew girl-detective series when she was a kid.

**Clarence Thomas**  
Associate Justice  
**Hometown:** Pin Point, Georgia  
**Views:** Conservative  
**Nominated by:** President George H.W. Bush, a Republican  
**What May Surprise You:** He is only the second African-American to ever sit on the U.S. Supreme Court.



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**Word to Know**  
**confirm** (kuhn-FURM) *verb.*  
To give official approval to something or someone.