

Theodore F. Chisholm

Investiture of Hon. Jean Kies

On February 16, 2017, the Milwaukee County Circuit Court held an investiture of Jean Kies, L'91, as a judge of that court. Ted Chisholm, a campaign supporter, spoke on the occasion.



Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. As a young Milwaukeean and as someone who, in many ways, has grown up around this courthouse, it is truly an honor to speak here today.

We're here today for two reasons. First, we're here to celebrate Jean Kies's exemplary record of service to this community. Look around this room, and you'll see lawyers, judges, politicians, and the hard-working people who make this community strong—and whose interests Jean has defended, as an attorney and as a civic advocate, over the past two decades.

We're also here because we, as Milwaukeeans, care about our future. Our community, as it heals the scars of racial, economic, and political divisions, is moving uphill, but slowly. These are times that rightly trouble those who are young and idealistic, but all too often unheard; those who are old and wise, but growingly dispirited; those who make our society vibrant and complete, but who nevertheless live in fear of its authorities.

The word *judge* has Latin roots that mean “to speak the law.” Every member of this community—and especially the young, the old, the marginalized, the afraid—deserves judges who speak the law clearly, courageously, and with no aims but justice and equity.

We're here today because Jean Kies is that kind of judge.

I first met Jean during her campaign for Branch 45, in late 2015. It is remarkable—and so incredibly rare—to meet someone so genuine in the political world. Within 30 seconds of talking with Jean, you know that she doesn't see you as simply a color, a voter, a name on a misdemeanor court docket sheet. Whether it's at a community forum or on the bench, Jean sees you for who you are—a member of this community, worthy of deep respect and possessing inherent human dignity.

These are the qualities that a judge needs in our era. Our society and our community demand judges who consider the entirety of the person who appears before them. As a young person who has been raised by two public servants who care viscerally about social justice, I don't want my peers—particularly those who don't share the privileges of my race or economic background—treated as rap sheets.

That's why Jean's background as a defense attorney, as a family law practitioner, and as an advocate for some of our community's most challenged youth is so valuable. Jean sees court cases not as numbers but as instances where the human experience has gone awry and requires healing. Sometimes, that healing requires firm and decisive action, and I think every prosecutor in this room knows that Jean is tough when toughness is in order. But just as importantly, I think all in this room know that they'd get the fairest of fair shakes if they appeared before Jean.

Before I conclude, I want to remark on one other quality that Jean brings with her to the bench—her tenacity. We all know the importance of a judiciary that is fiercely independent and tireless in its defense of civil liberties. I've seen Jean hold her own across Milwaukee County, explaining a consistent, principled vision of justice to her constituents at 9th and Locust and at Brust and Oklahoma. I've seen her work three events in a couple of hours, treating every person she meets with the same kindness and genuine interest. I have no doubt that she will devote the same vigor to preserving equal justice under the law—in criminal court and wherever her career takes her from there.

Thank you. ■



Photos by Lee Matz

U.S. Senior District Judge Charles N. Clevert Jr. administers the oath of office to Milwaukee County Circuit Court Judge Jean M. Kies.