

Senator Harry Reid*

Chief Judge Hug, affectionately known by his fellow judges on the Ninth Circuit as “Chief,” is a great Nevadan. His impact upon the law in the western United States is unsurpassed by any other Nevada lawyer. His service as Chief Judge of the largest and most influential federal appellate court in the United States is an unparalleled achievement in Nevada history. Chief Judge Hug, one of the most humble and unassuming people I have ever known, would never let anyone know that any of this is the case. Let me, therefore, tell you a little of his story by way of this tribute.

Born in Tonopah, where his family ran the local telephone company, Judge Hug has excelled at every stage of his life. The Judge’s father, Procter Hug, Sr., was a respected educator and former Superintendent of Washoe County Schools who taught the Judge very well. Judge Hug was selected by his classmates and faculty at Sparks High School as Best Boy in 1949. He was Student Body President and ran track during his time at the University of Nevada, where he graduated in 1953. He served in the United States Navy before going on to further achievement at Stanford Law School. This success as a young man only presaged the legacy he would create as a Nevada lawyer and judge.

Before his appointment to the federal bench by President Carter in 1977, Judge Hug was a successful litigator and partner with the law firm of Woodburn and Wedge. His private practice experience is probably best remembered for his dogged and successful defense of the University of Nevada in several disputes with the NCAA. Some twenty-five years later, Judge Hug’s presence and sage counsel are still spoken of by the attorneys with whom he worked. As an attorney, Judge Hug was known as one of the most effective and persuasive oral advocates to have appeared in a Nevada courtroom.

After joining the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, Chief Judge Hug soon distinguished himself by his straight-forward and practical approach to complicated legal questions. His legal writing style became known as a pattern of clarity and preciseness. Chief Judge Hug is liked for his courteous and direct manner in questioning attorneys during oral argument. He always asked his questions with a smile on his face, and was kind to all counsel, irrespective of his view regarding the disposition, or merits, of their cases.

But above all, Chief Judge Hug should be recognized as the most effective advocate and defender that the Ninth Circuit has known in Washington. He can truly be described as the man who saved the Ninth Circuit. The fact that the Ninth Circuit continues to exist as we have known it is attributable to Chief Judge Hug’s tireless work and persuasive abilities. Chief Judge Hug has appeared impressively before members of the House and Senate, congressional panels studying the Ninth Circuit, and committees of the United States Supreme Court. He successfully challenged the notion that the Ninth Circuit needed to be split. In these many public appearances, Judge Hug proved himself capable of confounding the Circuit’s critics.

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For me, one very telling example of Judge Hug's impressive personal qualities and character is the love and esteem that his current and former law clerks have for him. I know of this very well, as two of my sons have had the privilege to serve as law clerks in Chief Judge Hug's chambers. Recently, twenty years' worth of law clerks held a reunion to honor the Judge as he completed his service as Chief Judge. More than fifty former Hug clerks, many now accomplished attorneys in their own right, traveled across the country for this occasion. At the reunion, more than an hour was spent in heartfelt tribute, as each former clerk took an opportunity to speak for a few moments about how the Judge had impacted their lives and careers.

Chief Judge Hug proves that it is not impossible for someone in public service to be universally liked and respected. It has been an honor for me to know him for these last several decades. The William Boyd School of Law could pick no individual lawyer in Nevada more deserving of tribute.
