

Remarks of
U.S. Senior Circuit Judge Frank M. Coffin
Induction of John A. Woodcock, Jr.
United States District Judge
Bangor, Maine October 2, 2003

Ever since life and work made me conscious of the state of Maine beyond the borders of my town and county, I have been aware of Woodcocks, medical, legal, and political. Even though we might be on opposite sides of the political fence, this did not reduce the fun or mutual respect which we shared. And I always had the hope that John's mother would prove an enlightening influence.

Now that family has given us our newest district judge. I am deeply touched by being included in this program. I hope not to abuse the privilege by telling you what you already know about John. His 27 years of law and civic leadership are rich credentials for his new position. What I want to add are a few footnotes given me by John's sister Libby, now an Assistant U.S. Attorney in Vermont, but once a student of mine at the University of Maine Law School.

John's interest in being a judge, according to John's mother, may have begun with John's grandmother, Nana, who was always enthusiastically proud of her father, a judge of New York's Supreme Court. Then of course there was Uncle Allan, this county's permanent probate judge for nearly four decades.

Perhaps the acid test for any judicial prospect is whether he or she possesses that ineffable quality, judicial temperament. John passed that test with flying colors last August 31. Although a rabid Red Sox fan, he attended Roger Clemens's last appearance in Fenway Park and, as Libby put it, "resolved that he would not boo the Rocket, despite his defection to the Evil Empire." Talk about judicial restraint.

John has also demonstrated his possession of the key qualities of patience, attentiveness, and fairness by being a virtual judge at practice sessions of Hampden Academy's Mock Trial Team. Since each of John's three sons, Jack, Patrick, and Chris, have been members of the team, this led a Senator at John's confirmation hearing to ask if he had been harder on his sons than on other team members. His answer showed how much he valued the Constitution. He said, "Senator - I have a healthy respect for the Fifth Amendment."

Now John joins an old and prestigious court. He is the 16th judge in its 214 year history, beginning with David Sewall in 1789. I am somewhat unhinged in reflecting that I have worked with and known well over half of these judges, having clerked for the eighth, Judge John D. Clifford, Jr., been a law partner and courthouse neighbor of the ninth, Judge Gignoux, sworn in the tenth, George Mitchell, served on my own court with the eleventh, Judge Cyr, and been a fortunate colleague of Judge Brody and Chief Judges Carter, Hornby, and Singal.

It is difficult for me to put in a few words the respect I feel for this court. For thirty-one years Judge Gignoux, in the eyes of the federal judiciary, was an ideal judge. And Judges Cyr, Carter, Hornby, Brody, and Singal have succeeded in maintaining the same high standards of quality and timeliness. I rate this court at the very summit of the nation's 94 districts. I know that John Woodcock will be a worthy member and wish him a long, fruitful, and happy life on this great bench.