

Tribute to William K. Suter

Solicitor General Donald B. Verrilli*

On the occasion of his retirement, we salute the incomparable General William Kent Suter, Clerk of the Court. His twenty-two years of service to the Court capped off a career that sets the gold standard for public service and love of country. General Suter is a true patriot. After graduating from Tulane Law School, he enrolled in the Army's graduate law program at the University of Virginia. He served with great distinction as a military lawyer's lawyer in many capacities, in many parts of the world, and rose to the rank of general. His Vietnam service earned him a richly deserved Bronze Star and a Distinguished Service Medal.

As Clerk, the role in which most of us have come to know him, he certainly set the gold standard. Of his many gifts, one is his ability to make arguing counsel comfortable, particularly those new to the Court. I especially like the story he would tell counsel about the benefits of knowing the client's business. He used to tell about an advocate being asked "what's the difference between ale and beer" during an argument about a law that restricted listing alcohol content on beer labels, and how impressive it was that the lawyer knew the answer. Well that lawyer was Bruce Ennis, and the case was *Rubin v. Coors Brewing Co.*, a case I worked on with Bruce as a young lawyer. Bruce knew the answer was that ale is top fermented and beer is bottom fermented. He knew that because he and I had been out to Colorado to tour the Coors brewery a few weeks before the argument and spent enough time in the tasting room to make sure we had mastered the key facts—proving the wisdom of General Suter's admonition that you can never be too prepared.

All of us in the Supreme Court Bar have experienced the extraordinarily helpful and congenial quality of the Clerk's Office under his watch. The Office is always ready to work with us to solve problems and make sure the cases are presented to the Court in the most effective manner possible. General Suter made sure his Office

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could handle any contingency. When one of our lawyers arrived for argument without his morning coat (yes, it did happen, but I won't say who it was!), General Suter was at the ready with a collection of morning suit coats and disaster was averted.

It is quite evident to all of us who work with the Office that General Suter runs a great ship because the people under him are terrific to deal with and wonderful emissaries of the Court. He has overseen a seamless transition to the digital era in practice before the Court, and has revolutionized access to the work of the Court and to lawyers' submissions. He has managed more than his share of big moments over his twenty-two years, always with aplomb. And he has done it all with a gracious manner, a ready smile, and a wonderful sense of humor. He has been a great leader.

Although it is difficult to imagine walking into the Supreme Court and not experiencing General Suter's beaming countenance and disarming wit, we can all be confident that he will ensure a smooth transition to a new regime that continues to meet the standards he has set—that is just the kind of man he is. While we very much wish we could continue to benefit from his astute management, his wise counsel, and his ever-present good humor and friendship, he has certainly earned a happy and fulfilling retirement with his beloved wife Jeanie. But he will be missed. About that there is no doubt.