



Louis C. Bechtle

Born: December 14, 1927, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Died: December 22, 2024, in Audubon, Pennsylvania

Federal Judicial Service:

Judge, U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania

Nominated by Richard M. Nixon on February 14, 1972, to a seat vacated by John W. Lord, Jr.

Confirmed by the Senate on March 2, 1972, and received commission on March 7, 1972. Served as chief judge, 1990-1993. Assumed senior status on April 30, 1993.

Service terminated on June 30, 2001, due to retirement.

Education:

Temple University, B.S., 1951

Temple University School of Law (now James E. Beasley School of Law), LL.B., 1954

Professional Career:

U.S. Army: 1946-1947

Assistant U.S. Attorney, Eastern District of Pennsylvania: 1956-1959

Private Practice, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: 1959-1962

Private Practice, Norristown, Pennsylvania: 1962-1969

U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania: 1969-1972

Member, U.S. Judicial Panel on Multidistrict Litigation: 1994-2001

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Judicial Biography

*In 1972, President Richard M. Nixon appointed to the Court Louis C. Bechtle, the United States Attorney since 1969. Bechtle traveled the same path to the District Court as eight of his predecessors: Judges Lewis, Holland, Thompson, Bard, Ganey, Follmer, Wood, and Joseph Lord, all of whom had held the office of United States Attorney. Bechtle resided in Montgomery County and had previously practiced law there at the Wisler Pearlstine firm. Chief Justice William Rehnquist designated him as a member of the Judicial Panel on Multidistrict Litigation. He also served as the Chief Judge of the Eastern District for several years in the early 1990's.

As a result of *Roe v. Wade*, the Pennsylvania's General Assembly quickly passed the Abortion Control Act of 1974, but it was not long before a three-judge panel comprised of Judge Green, Judge Newcomer, and Circuit Judge Arlin Adams declared portions of the Act unconstitutional, including provisions requiring parental consent for a minor to have an abortion and the provision requiring spousal consent in all cases. Several years later Judge Bechtle held that Pennsylvania's prohibition against Medicaid funding for abortions other than those necessary to save the life of the mother violated federal law.

In the early 1990's, Chief Judge Bechtle organized a court retreat, a several-day event away from the courthouse. The judges found the retreat to be very helpful, and one has been held in most subsequent years. The topics vary from "nuts and bolts" issues with which judges must contend in their everyday work to discussions on matters of broader interest. Sometimes the judges themselves conduct the program on a particular subject while on other occasions they engage outside speakers.

Judge Bechtle was given multiple high profile special appointments by the chief justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, including overseeing the criminal trial of a sitting federal judge in San Francisco and the litigation involving the mass-casualty DuPont Hotel Fire in Puerto Rico. In the early 1980's, Judge Bechtle presided over the history making trial of former Ukrainian police officer Wolodymir Osidach, who had collaborated with the Nazis and later immigrated to the United States under false pretenses, the verdict resulting in the revocation of Osidach's U.S. citizenship. Judge Bechtle also enjoined racially discriminatory practices by the International Union of Operating Engineers, oversaw the desegregation of the Philadelphia Fire Department, and presided over the decade long federal court supervision of United Union of Roofers Local 30, the leadership of which was the subject of multiple criminal racketeering convictions. Throughout his career on the bench, Judge Bechtle handled complex mass tort cases. These included, among many others, the various civil lawsuits stemming from the tragic 1980 MGM Grand Hotel fire in Las Vegas, the *In re Air Crash Disaster* multidistrict litigation (MDL), the orthopedic bone screw MDL, and the "fen-phen" diet drug MDL in which he approved a multibillion dollar settlement. He also presided over the first asbestos case tried and handled

* The following material is excerpted from JUDGE HARVEY BARTLE, III, *MORTALS WITH TREMENDOUS RESPONSIBILITIES, A HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF PENNSYLVANIA*, 3-12 (Saint Joseph's University Press, 2011). Reproduced with the permission of the author, Judge Harvey Bartle, III, and the publisher, Saint Joseph's University Press.

precedent setting criminal cases, including in 1979 a major local voting fraud case, *United States v. Cianciulli*.

Judge Bechtle served as Chief Judge from 1990 to 1993. He assumed senior status on April 30, 1993, and retired from the bench on June 30, 2001 to return to the private practice of law. He passed away at the age of 97 on December 22, 2024 in Audubon, Pennsylvania.