



Robert S. Gawthrop, III

Born: December 2, 1942, in West Chester, Pennsylvania

Died: August 1, 1999, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

**Federal Judicial Service:**

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

Nominated by Ronald Reagan on September 30, 1987, to a seat vacated by J. William Ditter, Jr.

Confirmed by the Senate on December 8, 1987, and received commission on December 9, 1987.

Service terminated on August 1, 1999, due to death.

**Education:**

Amherst College, B.A., 1964

Dickinson School of Law (now Penn State Dickinson Law), J.D., 1970

**Professional Career:**

U.S. Army Lieutenant, Field Artillery: 1965-1967

Law Clerk, Hon. Lee F. Swope, Court of Common Pleas of Dauphin County, Pennsylvania:  
1969-1970

Private Practice, West Chester, Pennsylvania: 1970-1978

Assistant District Attorney, West Chester, Pennsylvania: 1971-1978

Assistant District Attorney, Wayne County, Pennsylvania: 1976-1977

Judge, Court of Common Pleas of Chester County, Pennsylvania: 1978-1988

Adjunct Professor, Dickinson School of Law: 1981-1982

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## Judicial Biography

Judge Gawthrop attended the Haverford School and was a 1964 graduate of Amherst College and a 1970 graduate of Dickinson School of Law.

He served in the U.S. Army as a First Lieutenant in Korea.

Prior to serving as a federal judge, he was a judge on the Court of Common Pleas of Chester County. He was an Assistant District Attorney in Chester County from 1971 to 1978.

On the faculty of the Pennsylvania College of the Judiciary, he instructed fellow judges in areas such as criminal law procedure, evidence, and the handling of jury trials. He also taught lawyers, both in the Pennsylvania Bar Institute and Academy of Advocacy, and law students as an adjunct professor of advocacy at the Dickinson School of Law.

He was an avid outdoorsman and singer. He performed many leading roles in all 14 of Gilbert and Sullivan operettas in England as well as the Philadelphia region. He sang principal roles in opera, operetta, and musical comedy in groups that include the Rose Valley Chorus, the Savoy Company, Opera Delaware, and he was a singing member of the Orpheus Club of Philadelphia. He played the Pirate King in "The Pirates of Penzance" with the English D'Oyley Carte company.

The cases he handled included one involving a law firm accused of firing a young associate with the AIDS virus. Although the 1994 case ended in a settlement, Judge Gawthrop wrote the first opinion that people who show no symptoms of AIDS can still be considered disabled under the Americans with Disabilities Act. The case had notable similarities to the one depicted in the Academy Award-winning movie "Philadelphia" which was released in 1993.

Among other notable cases in Judge Gawthrop's court were the 1996 sentencing of five police officers who pleaded guilty in a corruption scandal; the 1996 racketeering and bribery trial of the late U.S. Representative Joseph M. McDade, R-Pa, which resulted in McDade's acquittal; and the lawsuit brought by parents against the Chester-Upland School District, in which he appointed a special master to implement education reforms.

His service on the court was terminated by his death on August 1, 1999 in Philadelphia, at the age of 56.