



JOHN PAUL STEVENS
FOUNDATION

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THE JOHN PAUL STEVENS FOUNDATION NEWSLETTER

Dear Friends,

Justice Stevens served his country in many ways, including a stint as associate counsel for a House subcommittee in 1951. His public service experiences informed his belief that “lawyers are the guardians of our freedom.”

Trained, committed public interest lawyers are needed now more than ever. The Stevens Fellowship opens the door to a lifetime of service, including at all levels of government. Our 2026 Fellows interned at local government agencies, state attorney general offices, and federal departments including the DOJ and EEOC.

My own experience echoes what Justice Stevens shared. In 2008, I partnered with Philadelphia government officials to help build a nationally recognized mortgage foreclosure diversion program. The lawyers working for the city cared deeply about keeping people in their homes, and leveraged resources across agencies to ensure the program's success. Thousands of people stayed in their homes because of the hard work of trained, committed public servants.

I hope you enjoy reading about all the ways we are supporting our Fellows and Alumni Fellows to create a pipeline of public interest lawyers. Thank you for being a part of our community.

With gratitude,
Sara Woods, Executive Director

Congratulations to the 2026 Stevens Fellows!



FELLOWSHIP SPOTLIGHT: PATHS IN GOVERNMENT SERVICE

Government service can be one of many doors into meaningful public interest work. Justice Stevens's own career is a great reminder of this. He spent most of his early legal career in private practice, but repeatedly sought out opportunities to serve the public, including the House Judiciary subcommittee, the Attorney General's National Committee to Study Antitrust Laws, and serving as chair of the Illinois commission. He also took on significant pro bono matters and ultimately became a federal appellate judge before joining the Supreme Court. We are proud to feature a couple of Fellows forging their way in government service.



Sonja Zavala-Sandoval

**2005 Fellow, Santa Clara University School of Law
Senior Staff Attorney, California Supreme Court**

Sonja never expected that a law school externship would chart the course for her career. Today, 12 years into her role as a Senior Staff Attorney on the Civil Central Staff of the California Supreme Court, Sonja provides recommendations to the Court on whether to grant or deny review in general civil matters.

Her journey began at Santa Clara University School of Law, where an externship with the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit introduced her to a career in the judiciary. "I looked around at the Ninth Circuit and saw all these happy people, working on interesting issues, and providing a service to the court," she recalls. **"It seemed like a great balance."** After law school, Sonja spent five years as a staff attorney at the Ninth Circuit, followed by a clerkship with U.S. District Court Judge Lawrence O'Neill. She joined the California Supreme Court staff in 2014 and has been there ever since.

The Stevens Fellowship was an important part of that path. As a first-generation lawyer who financed law school with loans, receiving the Fellowship was more than financial support, it was **"a beautiful reminder that I belonged."** The 2005 Fellowship enabled Sonja to spend her second-year summer at the ACLU of Northern California, an experience that gave her confidence and ultimately helped open the door to her career with the courts.

Now, Sonja sees supporting the next generation of Stevens Fellows as more important than ever.

"You never know who is a first-generation lawyer, who is struggling financially, or even who is struggling to feel a sense of belonging in law school," she says. A Fellowship can be a turning point, reminding a future public interest lawyer that they belong, their work matters, and they have an important place in the legal community.



Calling all Alumni Fellows!

We want to hear your story - let us know via [this form](#)!





Mikayla Croslin

**U.S. Attorney's Office
for the Western
District of Oklahoma**

"The U.S. Attorney's Office gave me the **sense of purpose and belonging** I had been searching for in school. My internship has made me more secure in my decision to pursue my law degree and to practice in the public interest and government sector. I want to feel like what I am doing has an impact and I think a career in public interest is the best place to do that."



Jordan Gilchrist

**Office of the Federal
Public Defender-
Eastern District of North
Carolina**

"One of the most meaningful lessons I have learned this summer is the importance of **showing up for your client because, at times, you may be all they have.** I have seen firsthand how advocacy extends beyond legal arguments. It also means listening, building trust, and ensuring clients feel heard during some of the most difficult moments of their lives."



Chloe Stephens

**Department of Justice
Office of Tribal Justice**

"I've learned just how much the legal community around you can shape your career. Through programs like the Stevens Fellowship and other connections I've made here in D.C., I've seen firsthand how **invaluable a strong, supportive network of mentors and peers is.** Not just for opportunities, but for navigating the legal field with people who genuinely want to see me succeed."



Matthew Torres

**Brennan Center for Justice
and ACLU of New Mexico**

"The 'arc of the moral universe' might bend toward justice, but it does not do so on its own. It's through the **tireless efforts of brilliant advocates** everywhere that we come closer to the ideals of justice and equality that we strive for."

2026 FELLOWS: AT A GLANCE

 158 FELLOWS	 38 LAW SCHOOLS	 139 UNIQUE EMPLOYERS	 25 STATES
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WHERE FELLOWS SERVED

40% Nonprofit

31% Government

29% Public Defender



1,400+

FELLOWS STRONG

Our JPSF community continues to grow.

2026 Distinguished Alumni Awards Presentation & Stevens Fellowship Program Reception

Thursday, October 8, 5:30-7:30p.m. at Santa Clara University School of Law

This event marks the 26th anniversary of the partnership between Santa Clara Law and the John Paul Stevens Foundation. At this remarkable gathering, the Foundation will present the 2026 Distinguished Alumni Award to the **Honorable Stephanie D. Grogan Jones**, a 2003 Stevens Fellow and a Solano County Superior Court judge; and the **Honorable Benjamin D. Galloway**, a 2000 Stevens Fellow and a Sacramento County Superior Court judge.

Whether you're a 2026 Stevens Fellow beginning your public interest journey, a Stevens alumni fellow, or a friend of the Foundation committed to building a pipeline of public interest lawyers, we hope you'll join us for an evening of connection, inspiration, and celebration of public service and the living legacy of Justice Stevens. We look forward to celebrating with you!

RSVP Here: <https://invite.social/waf4ngtol5cooups>



JOHN PAUL STEVENS
FOUNDATION



Santa Clara
School of Law

A CAREER ROOTED IN SERVICE: CHRIS MEADE, CLERK TERM 1997

From clerking for Justice John Paul Stevens to arguing cases before the U.S. Supreme Court, serving as General Counsel of the U.S. Department of the Treasury, and now as General Counsel and Chief Legal Officer at BlackRock, **Chris Meade** has built an extraordinary career. When he reflects on that journey, he returns to the lessons he learned from Justice Stevens: **humility, integrity, curiosity, and the power of mentors**. Today, Chris leads BlackRock's legal and compliance teams, a role he describes as a privilege. But some of his most formative lessons came much earlier, from Justice Stevens's chambers.



CHRIS MEADE
OT 1997

The Call Every Young Lawyer Dreams Of

Chris vividly remembers receiving the call to interview for a Supreme Court clerkship. "It was an incredible moment, a lawyer's dream," he recalls. On interview day, he was ushered through the halls of the Supreme Court before finding himself sitting across from Justice Stevens.

They discussed his background, the cases before the Court that Term, and his public interest internships. Chris then met with the clerks, after which he walked back outside, stunned by the surreal experience.

"I told myself that if I didn't get the clerkship, I would always have that experience." Chris did get the clerkship and soon discovered that Justice Stevens was every bit as remarkable as he had hoped. "He was incredibly smart, and also a **kind, gentle, and humble person**."

When Justice Stevens had a question for one of his clerks, he did not summon them. Instead, he would walk to their office and politely ask, "Do you have a minute?" The answer was always, "Of course, Justice!"

Chris remembers standing at the podium late at night during his clerkship, imagining himself saying, "Mr. Chief Justice, and may it please the Court." He would later stand at that very podium for real.

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"It was an incredible moment, a lawyer's dream."

— CHRIS MEADE

The Lessons That Stayed

Asked what he carries with him from Justice Stevens, Chris answers simply: "Humility. Integrity. Caring about the facts of each case." Justice Stevens's portrait hangs in his office today.

One story captures Justice Stevens's humility particularly well. While playing golf in Virginia with a lawyer he had never met, Justice Stevens introduced himself simply as "John" or "John Stevens." When asked what he did, he said he was a lawyer. Asked what kind of lawyer, he replied, "Well, I am a Judge."

The lawyer was impressed. He asked, "Which court?" Only then did Justice Stevens reveal that he was a Supreme Court Justice.

A Career of Impact



A Career Shaped by Public Service

Chris's commitment to public service began after college, when he worked at a nonprofit staffing legal clinics in New York serving people experiencing homelessness.

"It was an incredibly rewarding experience," he says. "I was also inspired by the lawyers who I worked with, so smart and committed." That experience set him on his path to becoming a lawyer.

Standing before the Justices

Chris's career eventually brought him back to the Supreme Court, but this time as an attorney. He argued four cases before the Court, which he describes as "perhaps the greatest professional moment."

Preparation was everything: "I prepared relentlessly—seeking to anticipate every question and prepare and refine every response in advance," Chris says. "It's a basic principle that I follow to this day: for anything important, **prepare, prepare, prepare.**"

Then came argument day: "There is a hush that comes over the courtroom as the clock is about to strike 10. The gavel then sounds and the Justices appear from behind the curtain." And there was one especially meaningful moment: when Justice Stevens took the bench, he would wink at Chris.

Years later, while practicing at WilmerHale, he began considering government service after hearing about the meaningful work of his colleagues and mentors. After President Obama was elected, Chris applied to the Treasury Department and got the job. "I had been a law firm partner for five years, and assumed it would be an easy move. Arriving there, it was a foreign world, and there was a steep learning curve."

During his over five years at the Treasury, Chris worked on high-stakes issues, ranging from debt-limit crises, Dodd-Frank implementation, sanctions, money laundering, and tax policy. He served first as Principal Deputy General Counsel, then Acting General Counsel, and ultimately General Counsel. "It was a formative experience," he says. "It was challenging, with lots of complex issues. But it was also incredibly rewarding and dynamic."

Connecting the Dots

Today, Chris's career looks very different from those early days in public interest legal clinics and Justice Stevens's chambers. Yet he sees a clear thread connecting it all: the people who taught him, challenged him, and encouraged him along the way. Chris credits the brilliant lawyers, judges, and public servants who mentored him with shaping not only his legal skills, but also how he approaches difficult problems and conducts himself as a lawyer and as a person.

"Justice Stevens was one of those mentors, and there have been many others as well. Their influence has shaped my life and career."

And that is part of what makes the John Paul Stevens Foundation so meaningful to Chris. **"The Stevens Foundation is Justice Stevens's living legacy. It was specifically how he wanted to be honored and remembered."**

Chris recently had the opportunity to meet Stevens Fellows at an event in New York City. Seeing their passion and enthusiasm, he was reminded of the legacy that continues through each new generation.



Chris and Justice Stevens at a 2019 JPS clerk reunion celebrating Justice Stevens's 99th birthday

**HIS ADVICE TO
THE NEXT GENERATION
OF PUBLIC INTEREST
LAWYERS:**

**Embrace and
rely on mentors.**

Be curious.

**Always seek
to grow.**

"I think the Justice would have been proud to see his legacy carried on by the Fellows in this way."

— CHRIS MEADE



SUMMER 2026 AT A GLANCE

Throughout the summer of 2026, the Foundation hosted eight in-person receptions to celebrate our 158 Stevens Fellows and introduce them to the JPSF community. We are grateful to our supporters for providing beautiful spaces for our Fellows and clerks to gather and connect, and to our Alumni Fellows for planning local gatherings. These receptions offered an opportunity for the new 2026 cohort to connect with Alumni Fellows and clerks, find support and inspiration, and celebrate our commitment to public service and the living legacy of Justice Stevens.



Fellows in Seattle



Fellows in Philadelphia

FELLOWS AT THE SUPREME COURT

The 2026 Fellows and Alumni Fellows had an exclusive opportunity to take a tour of the U.S. Supreme Court with Stevens clerk Aaron Zelinsky. They got an inside perspective on where Justice Stevens spent decades and what it was like to be a law clerk for the Justice!



Stevens Fellows at the U.S. Supreme Court



JPSF Reception in San Francisco



JPSF Reception in Chicago



FUN FACTS ABOUT JUSTICE STEVENS

Did you know?

It is widely known that Justice Stevens was a devoted Chicago Cubs fan, but his Chicago sports loyalties did not stop at Wrigley Field. He was also a passionate Bears fan, and was not afraid to show it. At a 1985 holiday family gathering, he joined in by lip syncing and dancing to the legendary "Super Bowl Shuffle." When Bears quarterback Jim McMahon was fined for wearing a headband during the playoffs, Justice Stevens showed his support in his own unmistakable way: he donned a headband himself during a speech in Chicago.

MEET THE BOARD

MEET THE STAFF



Sara Woods
Executive Director



Anjuli Arora-Dow
Program Director



Toni Schottenhammer
Program Associate



The JPSF Board of Directors volunteers its time to support Justice Stevens's living legacy and met in person for a powerful strategy session in Washington, D.C.



**Invest in the next
generation of Fellows!**

Together, we are building a dynamic and effective justice system through a cadre of trained and committed lawyers doing public interest work.

→ jpstevensfoundation.org/donate/