

Tribute to Justice O'Connor

JOHN PAUL STEVENS

The 102d Justice to serve on the Supreme Court was also the first whose name begins with the letter “O.” Knowledgeable scholars and students of the Court’s history are not likely to attach great significance to that fact. While Byron White was undoubtedly the finest athlete ever to serve on the Court, and also was an avid golfer, I am quite sure that No. 102 broke 90 more regularly than he did. I doubt that that fact will provide No. 102 with her principal claim to fame either. While a third happenstance—that she was also the first woman to serve on the Court—will be widely noted and acclaimed, in my judgment that is merely another interesting aspect of Sandra Day O’Connor’s remarkable career and remarkable contribution to the work of the Court.

I firmly believe that it is the consistent quality of excellence in her opinions that will provide the most accurate and reliable evidence for future historians who write about her work. This quality appears not only in her opinions in cases subject to significant public attention, but also in the less heralded cases that are the grist of our docket. Consider, for example, her lucid and honest opinion in *Lingle v. Chevron U.S.A. Inc.*, 544 U.S. 528 (2005), which, if not the very best, was surely one of the best opinions announced last Term. Or her dissent in *Atwater v. Lago Vista*, 532 U.S. 318 (2001), with its forceful and persuasive points made in the clearest possible prose.

Having had the privilege of working with Sandra during the entire period of her active

service on the Court—a period during which my initial admiration and affection for her continuously grew stronger and stronger—I am competent to testify that her unrecorded contributions to our deliberations and to the resolution of the many problems the Court has confronted have been uniformly dedicated to the best interest of the institution. Like other fine athletes, she has been a true “team player,” and this teammate will miss her greatly. I am confident, however, that her career as a valued leader in a larger arena is far from over. As the author of *The Tempest* has reminded us, “What’s past is prologue.” Knowing Sandra, and knowing something about her past, I confidently predict an interesting and memorable future.