

# Ginsburg, colleagues praise Abrahamson during farewell ceremony

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U.S. Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg praised retiring Wisconsin Supreme Court Justice Shirley Abrahamson as “the very best, the most courageous and sage, the least self-regarding” judge she had encountered.

“As lawyer, law teacher and judge, she has inspired legions to follow in her way, to strive constantly to make the legal system genuinely equal and accessible to all who dwell in our fair land,” Ginsburg said in a moving video.

The message was delivered at a packed farewell ceremony for Abrahamson in the Capitol Rotunda yesterday evening.

Gov. Tony Evers, former Dem Gov. Jim Doyle, former Supreme Court Justice Janine Geske and federal appeals court judge and former Wisconsin Supreme Court Justice Diane Sykes all joined Ginsburg in paying tribute to the outgoing 85-year-old Abrahamson.

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She became the first woman to serve on the Wisconsin Supreme Court with her appointment in 1976 and then rose to chief justice. In poor health, she declined to run for re-election, and her seat was won in April by conservative Brian Hagedorn. She will leave the court in August.

Abrahamson, who spoke briefly at the event, touted her electoral record, noting that while she was always challenged, she won full, 10-year terms on the bench.

“I have always been opposed in an election; that’s a record,” Abrahamson said.

“But the other record is I won, and I never received less than 55 percent of the vote.”

Along the way, she earned a reputation as a trailblazer for female judges and built a national fundraising network that was unique among state Supreme Court justices.

But her time as chief justice was also marked with controversy. Voters approved a GOP-authored constitutional amendment in 2015 to allow the justices to select who leads the court rather than bestowing that honor to the longest-serving member.

Despite conservatives flipping control of the high court, Abrahamson had continued to hold onto the chief justice’s office. She filed a lawsuit seeking to prevent the amendment from taking effect until after her 10-year term ended in 2019. That effort was rejected, and conservative Pat Roggensack has served as chief justice since 2015.