

M. Margaret McKeown



Born in Casper, Wyoming, Judge Mary Margaret McKeown, known as M³, epitomizes the sense of new possibilities shared by so many of the post-war generation. Wyoming imprinted her with a spirit of adventure and community service. The first generation of her family to attend college, Judge McKeown took these lessons to shape her own path forward.

After studying Hispanic studies at the University of Madrid, Judge McKeown graduated from the University of Wyoming and in 1975 obtained her law degree from Georgetown University Law Center, which later awarded her an honorary doctorate. She went to law school, in part, because her internship with a U.S. senator from Wyoming made her wonder “why boys worked on policy while girls worked in the mail room.” The senator found this a surprisingly good question, igniting a budding career in law and public policy.

Judge McKeown excelled as a trial and appellate lawyer in Seattle and Washington, D.C. with the international law firm Perkins Coie LLP. She founded the firm’s intellectual property practice, litigated antitrust and constitutional law matters, and represented high-profile clients. Judge McKeown’s significant pro bono contributions in civil rights litigation included sex discrimination, privacy and strip search cases, serving as lead counsel in the challenge to admit women to Seattle’s Rotary Club, and arguing before the U. S. Supreme Court.

Her love of the law as both an intellectual engagement and a vehicle for justice carried her through many of the “firsts” of women of her generation. As the first female partner at Perkins Coie, first woman on the firm’s executive committee, and first female managing director, she transformed the workplace for women. She was selected as one of the “Fifty Most Influential Women Lawyers” by the *National Law Journal* and named one of “Washington’s Winningest Trial Lawyers.” She was a founder and the first co-president of the statewide Washington Women Lawyers and received the Big Sisters Outstanding Mentor Award. She became the first woman to serve as president of the Federal Bar Association of the Western District of Washington and on Washington’s delegation to the ABA House of Delegates.

In 1998, President Clinton appointed Judge McKeown to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, where she continues to distinguish herself as a jurist and scholar. She has authored more than 300 precedential opinions and was selected by Chief Justice Roberts to chair the Judicial Conference of the United States Codes of Conduct Committee, the ethics committee for the federal judiciary.

Throughout her career, Judge McKeown has viewed professional and community service as intertwined. As a White House Fellow, she was appointed as Special Assistant to the Secretary of the Interior and Special Assistant at the White House. Judge McKeown also served as a Japan Society Fellow. In the ABA, she served as chair of the Standing Committee on Federal Judicial Improvements and founded the Immigration Justice Project. She is currently chair of the Rule of Law Initiative Latin America and Caribbean Council. She also is a member of the Council of the American Law Institute, the Judicial Advisory Committee of the American Society of International Law, and the board of the Federal Judges Association. She has been a tireless volunteer on the national board of the Girl Scouts of America, which awarded her its Cool Women award; is a past member of the national board of Volunteers of America; and now serves on the La Jolla Music Society board.

Judge McKeown teaches and lectures around the world—from San Diego to Shanghai—on judicial ethics, the rule of law, women’s rights, judicial independence, constitutional law, and intellectual property. She is an adjunct professor at Georgetown and the University of San Diego Law Schools, teaching the Constitution and the internet. She values her role as a teacher and mentor to countless students and lawyers.

Judge McKeown’s pioneering spirit is reflected in her personal pursuits as well. She was the only female member of the first American mountain climbing expedition to Mount Shishapangma, Tibet. She also makes time to volunteer at a camp in Colorado for children with cancer.

The hallmark of Judge McKeown’s life has been to fuse the priorities that so compete for time—profession, service, love of the larger world, friends, and family—into a seamless composite that has produced a leader in the national and global legal communities. She has done so with grace, humility, and generosity.