

New Alaska Supreme Court chief justice worked the trans-Alaska pipeline before starting a long legal career



By Alaska Daily News; May 7th, 2021.

The new chief justice of the Alaska Supreme Court is a third-generation Alaskan who worked on the trans-Alaska pipeline before heading to law school and embarking on a long legal career.

The other justices this week unanimously selected Justice Daniel E. Winfree as chief justice of the state’s highest court, according to an [announcement](#) from the Alaska Court System. Winfree joined the state Supreme Court in 2008 and follows Chief Justice Joel H. Bolger, whose term expires June 30.

Winfree, whose three-year term begins July 1, will be the first Alaska-born chief justice and second one from Fairbanks, court officials say. He is married to Cathleen Ringstad Winfree, “another Fairbanks-born, third-generation Alaskan” with whom he has two children.

Chief justices serves as administrative head of the judicial branch, presiding over Supreme Court arguments and conferences, appointing presiding judges for judicial districts and chairing the Alaska Judicial Council.

Winfree, whose grandparents were “turn-of-the-century Yukon and Alaska gold rushers,” was born in the Alaska Territory in 1953, courts officials said. He drove trucks and worked as a warehouseman in pipeline construction camps and at Prudhoe Bay, working on the trans-Alaska pipeline before attending college at the University of Oregon and getting his law degree from the University of California Berkeley.

Admitted to the Alaska Bar in 1982, he spent 25 years in private practice in Anchorage, Valdez and Fairbanks. He served with the Alaska Bar Association Board of Governors and Board of Trustees of the Alaska Bar Foundation and chairs the Supreme Court’s Code of Judicial Conduct Rules Committee and Appellate Rules Committee.

Winfree selected to be first Alaska-born chief justice of state Supreme Court

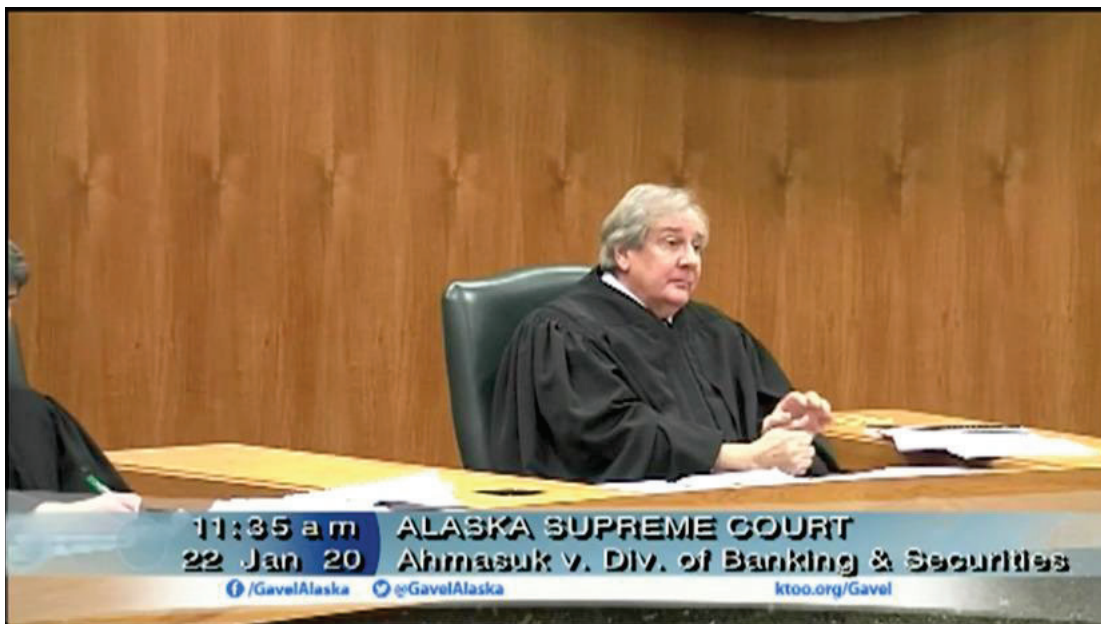
May 7, 2021 by Andrew Kitchenman, KTOO and Alaska Public Media

Daniel Winfree was selected unanimously on Wednesday as the chief justice of the Alaska Supreme Court.

Under the Alaska Constitution, justices select the chief justice by a majority vote. The chief justice presides over Supreme Court arguments and conferences and is the administrative head of the judicial branch of the state government.

Winfree is from Fairbanks and will be the first chief justice who was born in Alaska. He worked as a truck driver and in pipeline construction camps for the trans-Alaska pipeline. He also worked as a lawyer in private practice for 25 years before being appointed to the court by Gov. Sarah Palin in 2008.

Winfree's term starts on July 1, succeeding Chief Justice Joel Bolger. Winfree must retire by February 2023, when he reaches Alaska's mandatory retirement age for judges of 70. This will prevent him from serving a full three-year term as chief justice.



Supreme Court Justice Daniel Winfree questions a lawyer during oral arguments in 2020. Winfree was unanimously selected as the court's chief justice on Wednesday. (Screenshots courtesy of KTOO 360TV)

Alaska Court System

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May 6 at 10:45 AM ·

The members of the Alaska Supreme Court have unanimously selected Justice Daniel E. Winfree of Fairbanks to serve as Chief Justice starting July 1, 2021. Justice Winfree follows Chief Justice Joel H. Bolger, whose term expires June 30, 2021. Justice Winfree will be the first Alaskan-born Chief Justice, and the second Fairbanks Chief Justice.

Under Alaska's Constitution, the Chief Justice is selected from among the justices by majority vote. The Chief Justice serves a three-year term as the administrative head of the judicial branch of government, presides over Supreme Court arguments and conferences, appoints presiding judges for all judicial districts, and serves as the chair of the Alaska Judicial Council. A justice may serve more than one term as Chief Justice but may not serve consecutive terms in that office.

Justice Winfree joined the Alaska Supreme Court in January 2008. Born in the Alaska Territory in Fairbanks in 1953, he is the grandson of turn-of-the-century Yukon and Alaska gold rushers. From 1975 to 1978 he was a truck driver and warehouseman in pipeline construction camps and at Prudhoe Bay, working on the Trans-Alaska Pipeline. Justice Winfree earned a B.S. in Finance from the University of Oregon in 1977 and in 1981 earned M.B.A. and J.D. degrees from the University of California Berkeley. Admitted to the Alaska Bar in 1982, he spent twenty-five years in private practice in Anchorage, Valdez, and Fairbanks, working with large firms, small firms, and as a sole practitioner on matters across the state. He served nine years on the Alaska Bar Association Board of Governors and was its President from 1994-1995. He also served a term on the Bar Association's Ethics Committee and several terms on its Fee Arbitration Committee. The Bar Association presented him its Distinguished Service Award in 2007. After his final term on the Board of Governors, he joined the Board of Trustees of the Alaska Bar Foundation and served as its president for two years. He now chairs the Supreme Court's Code of Judicial Conduct Rules Committee and Appellate Rules Committee. Justice Winfree is married to another Fairbanks-born, third-generation Alaskan, Cathleen Ringstad Winfree. They have two children.

