DALRYMPLE PRESENTS THEODORE ROOSEVELT ROUGH RIDER
AWARD TO CHIEF JUSTICE VANDEWALLE

BISMARCK, N.D. – Gov. Jack Dalrymple today presented the North Dakota Theodore Roosevelt Rough Rider Award to North Dakota Supreme Court Chief Justice Gerald W. VandeWalle. He is the 41st recipient of the award, the state’s highest commendation for its citizens.

The award was presented following VandeWalle’s State of the Judiciary Address to a joint session of the 64th North Dakota Legislative Assembly. Other speakers at the ceremony included South Dakota Supreme Court Chief Justice David Gilbertson; Erica Moeser, president of the National Conference of Bar Examiners; and North Dakota Supreme Court Justice Dale Sandstrom.

“When you think about visionary leaders having a significant impact on our state, Justice VandeWalle stands out among the rest,” Dalrymple said. “Throughout his tenure, he has been instrumental in strengthening North Dakota’s judicial system and enhancing the safety and quality of life for our communities. His commitment to upholding the laws of our state and protecting the fundamental rights of our people has shaped his service over the past three decades and his numerous accomplishments will leave a lasting legacy on our state court system and the state of North Dakota.”

Justice VandeWalle has served on the North Dakota Supreme Court for more than 36 years and was recently re-elected to his fourth 10-year term. He has served as the court’s Chief Justice for the past 21 years, making him the longest-serving Chief Justice in North Dakota history and the longest-serving of all sitting Chief Justices in the nation.

Throughout his career, VandeWalle has made important contributions to the North Dakota Supreme Court and the state court system. He played an integral role in the unification of the court system, establishing a unified, statewide approach to court proceedings and the administration of justice. He was instrumental in redefining North Dakota’s judicial districts and increasing the number of judges to accommodate growth in the state’s economy and population. He also promoted the establishment of a mediation program for family law cases and created a trial court administration system to place administrators within the judicial districts to oversee court procedures.

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VandeWalle was born in 1933, and raised in Noonan, North Dakota. He attended the University of North Dakota, and in 1955, received a bachelor of science degree in Commerce from the School of Business. In 1958, he received a juris doctor degree magna cum laude from the University of North Dakota School of Law.

He was admitted to the State Bar of North Dakota in 1958 and accepted an appointment as Special Assistant Attorney General. In 1975, he was appointed First Assistant Attorney General. During his 20 years in the Attorney General’s office, VandeWalle held several portfolios, including elementary, secondary and higher education; the North Dakota Industrial Commission oil and gas division; and the State Retirement System.

In August 1978, VandeWalle was appointed to the North Dakota Supreme Court. That November, he was elected to serve an unexpired term and was re-elected to 10-year terms in 1984, 1994, 2004 and 2014.

In 1993, he was elected Chief Justice of the North Dakota Supreme Court, and has been re-elected to that post for five consecutive terms. His more than two decades as Chief Justice makes him the state’s longest-serving and the nation’s longest-serving of all sitting Chief Justices.

Between 1985 and 1987, VandeWalle served as the first chair of the North Dakota Judicial Conference. He also served as co-chair of the American Bar Association (ABA) Bar Admissions Committee and past chair of the Federal-State Tribal Relations Committee of the Conference of Chief Justices. He is past chair of the Council of the Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar of the ABA, past President of the Conference of Chief Justices, past chair of the National Center for State Courts, and past chair of the National Center for State Court’s Research Advisory Council.

VandeWalle has received several national awards and recognitions, including the Kutak Award from the ABA Section of Legal Education and Admission to the Bar recognizing substantial contributions toward increased understanding between legal education and the active practice of law; the American Inns of Court Professionalism award for the 8th Circuit; the National Center for State Courts Paul C. Reardon Award for outstanding contributions to the justice system; and the Warren Burger Society Award recognizing volunteers who have given extraordinary contributions of service to the National Center for State Courts.

“The idea that I would ever receive the Theodore Roosevelt Rough Rider Award from the state and people I love was never even in my wildest dreams or imagination,” VandeWalle said. “I cannot believe it is real. But if it is, I hope the focus is not on me as an individual, but rather appreciation and respect for the rule of law and our judicial system.”

An honorary rank of Colonel in the Theodore Roosevelt Rough Riders was established during the 1961 Dakota Territory Centennial. The award recognizes present and former North Dakotans who have been influenced by the state in achieving national recognition in their fields of endeavor, thereby reflecting credit and honor upon North Dakota and its citizens.

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