

Biography for Justice Luis Rovira

Former Colorado Supreme Court justice, known for writing opinion that overturned a ban on legal protections for gays, dies at 88

By Virginia Culver
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Luis Rovira, a former state Supreme Court justice, wrote for the majority overturning Amendment 2. Luis Rovira, a former chief justice of the Colorado Supreme Court who wrote the landmark opinion overturning a ban on legal protections for gay Coloradans, died at his Denver home Oct. 30, 2011. He was 88.

"He was one of the most revered people in the Colorado Bar," said Justice Gregory Hobbs Jr. "He had grace, intelligence, patience and leadership."

Rovira was best known for writing for the majority overturning Amendment 2 in 1992. The amendment to the state constitution, passed by voters, prohibited local governments from passing laws protecting gays or lesbians from discrimination.

The Colorado court ruling was later upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court.

Rovira "made amazing contributions to Colorado's court system," Chief Justice Michael Bender said in a prepared statement.

Among them, he helped create alternative dispute-resolution programs in 16 Colorado counties. During Rovira's tenure, a probation-services office was also created in the state court administrator's office, Bender said.

"He was a great community leader and had an old-world graciousness about him," said former Gov. Dick Lamm, who appointed Rovira to the court. "He was smart and ethical and seemed to have an aura of substance and caring about him."

Rovira was on the court 26 years and before that practiced law, concentrating on business, natural-resources, public-utility and real-estate law, his family said.

Rovira was active in supporting organizations that aided mentally disabled kids and numerous other community organizations.

Rovira handled everything with aplomb. When his kids got in trouble, he didn't yell; he "had a reasoned discourse with us," said his daughter.

Once, he was on a raft with his son, Douglas, and they got into whitewater. Everyone was struggling to keep afloat, but Luis Rovira sat and smoked his pipe. His son asked why he wasn't helping, and Luis Rovira said, "I assumed you knew what you were doing."

Luis Rovira was born Sept. 8, 1923, in San Juan, Puerto Rico, to an American mother and a Spanish father, and the family moved to the U.S. when he was 5. He finished high school in New York.

He loaded box cars and trucks in New Jersey and moved to Colorado after saving travel money and the \$25 for tuition at the University of Colorado.

He earned his undergraduate and law degrees at CU after serving in the Army during World War II.

He served as a Denver district judge prior to serving on the state Supreme Court.

He was married to Bette Kingdon, and they had two children. They later divorced. He married Lois Ann Thau 45 years ago.

In addition to her; his daughter, Merilyn Rovira of Princeton, N.J.; and his son, he is survived by six grandchildren.