

Midland Daily News

Supreme Court chief justice shows his lighter side

A reporter jokingly told a Michigan Supreme Court justice that the jurist probably qualified to vote here, having spent so much time attending and speaking at local events and being interviewed by Daily News staff.

The justice is Clifford W. Taylor of Laingsburg. Last week, other justices elected him chief justice.

Taylor has made light-hearted comments about himself, the court and others. Perhaps veteran close readers of the Daily News will remember some of these:

- In 1998, after Midlander Lawrence W. Reed, president of the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, called Taylor "one of the funniest judges I know," Taylor said that's something like being the tallest building in Wichita.

- Taylor told about 300 Mackinac Center banquet guests in Midland that an economist is sometimes said

to be someone who is "good with numbers but doesn't have the personality to be an accountant."

Reed — former chairman of Northwood University's economics department — has a fun-loving side, said Taylor, who explained that Reed enjoys sitting in an easy chair, lighting a fine cigar and "reading in the original Greek one of his own memos."

- Taylor, master of ceremonies at the Mackinac Center celebration, said a master of ceremonies is like a body at an Irish wake. "They need you to have the party, but they don't expect you to say too much."

- Of the Supreme Court, Taylor said, "We seem to have a propensity for taking things that are relatively easy and making them quite complex." So he proposed a new slogan for the court: "If you think it's simple, bring

it to us."

His colleagues' reaction to that proposal improved, he said, when he suggested the slogan could be stated in Latin.

- At a Midland reception after the late arrival of Taylor and four other justices delayed the start of Bill Schuette's Court of Appeals judicial investiture ceremony by 25 minutes, Taylor said the delay had three causes: late departure, a wrong turn and the fact the justices are "very law abiding."

Police always seemed to be wherever there was an opening in traffic on I-69, Taylor added.

- After speaking in Gladwin County, Taylor and Justice Robert P. Young Jr. got a standing ovation as they prepared to leave the 1999 Lincoln Day dinner early due to court business downstate.

"Say, we wouldn't have

quit talking so early if we'd known you were going to do that," Taylor told the crowd.

He soon returned to the room to announce that the lights of someone's parked truck were on.

"What a nice guy," was the truck driver's quiet comment.

- Earlier, Taylor got a standing ovation before his remarks at his swearing-in ceremony as a new justice.

"Well," said Taylor, who'd been a judge on the Michigan Court of Appeals, "that reminds me of the reaction my clerks have when I bring in one of my draft opinions."

- At that 1997 swearing-in ceremony, Taylor introduced his mother, Carolyn Taylor.

"Surely, although mother is far too loyal to admit it, as she attended a multitude of conferences with teachers in one state or another of outrage about my frisky behav-

ior as a boy, she surely could not have anticipated such a day.

She has become recently somewhat famous for her wonderfully motherly riposte upon learning from me that the governor was going to appoint me to the Supreme Court when she said, "That's nice, Cliff, what's next?" Finally, just like on the sidelines on the football game when they zoom in on the player who's the center of attention, I just want to say, "Thanks, Mom."

Then-Gov. John Engler appointed Taylor to the Court of Appeals in 1992 and to the Supreme Court in '97.

Taylor won election to the court in 1998 and 2000. The latter election was to a full eight-year term.

He ran as a Republican for attorney general in 1990, losing to 29-year Democratic incumbent Frank Kelley.

During that campaign,

Taylor said the attorney general saw himself as a consumer ombudsman and should devote more time and energy to attacking organized crime and public corruption and to fighting the drug trade.

"It's all left to local prosecutors who are not equipped for it," said Taylor, who was an assistant Ingham County prosecutor years earlier.

Taylor's wife, Lucille, was chief legal adviser to Gov. Engler.

On the Web:

Justice Taylor's 1997 swearing-in ceremony:

<http://www.micourthistory.org/resources/Special%20Sessions/1997%20Taylor%20Inv.php>

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