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Delaware Supreme Court Chief Justice Seitz Attends White House Ceremony to accept Presidential Citizens Medal on behalf of his father, Chancellor Seitz

*Collins J. Seitz Sr. (1914-1998) was Chancellor of the Court of Chancery from 1951 to 1966 and issued a landmark ruling rejecting segregation in Delaware public schools, which later became a part of *Brown v. Board of Education**

On Thursday Chief Justice Collins J. Seitz, Jr. along with other Seitz family members attended a ceremony at the White House to accept the Presidential Citizens Medal from President Joseph R. Biden on behalf of his late father, Chancellor Collins J. Seitz, Sr.

Chancellor Seitz, who passed in 1998, was among 20 that were honored by President Biden including two other Delawareans: former U.S. Senator Ted Kaufman and attorney Louis L. Redding, a Delaware civil rights pioneer, who also passed in 1998.

“The Seitz family thanks the President of the United States for awarding our father posthumously one of the government’s highest civilian honors,” said Chief Justice Seitz. “As a state court judge on Delaware’s Court of Chancery in the 1950s, he had the remarkable courage to declare that segregation in public school education – separate but equal – should be unconstitutional. The United States Supreme Court followed his lead and agreed with his reasoning, striking down the separate but equal doctrine in *Brown v. Board of Education*. We are overjoyed that President Biden saw fit to honor his legacy as a fiercely independent and principled judge unafraid to make difficult decisions that cut against popular opinion.”

The White House, in its statement announcing the recipients of the Presidential Citizens Medal, said Seitz was selected because he was “the first judge in America to integrate a white public school, dismantling the doctrine of “separate but equal” with exacting detail and reverence for the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment of our Constitution. His brave ruling tore down walls of separation to help us see each other as fellow Americans.”

The President also honored Louis Redding, the first black attorney in Delaware, and the man who brought the cases before Seitz challenging segregation in Delaware schools and other institutions. The President described Redding as a “towering figure and a generous mentor, he opened doors of equity and opportunity for all Americans.”

Chief Justice Seitz attended the ceremony with his family including his sister Virginia Seitz, who led the Office of Legal Counsel at the U.S. Department of Justice, and her husband, District of Columbia Court of Appeals Judge Roy McLeese III.

Collins J. Seitz, Sr. served as a Vice Chancellor on the Delaware Court of Chancery from 1946 until 1951, when he was elevated to the position of Chancellor, a position which he held until being named to the U.S. 3rd Circuit Court of Appeals in 1966. He later went on to serve as the Chief Judge of the appeals court from 1971 until 1984. He took senior status in 1989 and held that position until his passing in 1998.

It was during his time on the Court of Chancery that Seitz, Sr. took on two cases that directly challenged segregation in Delaware public schools, *Belton v. Gebhart* and *Bulah v. Gebhart*. In both cases, brought by Attorney Louis Redding, Chancellor Seitz found in favor of the plaintiffs. Both cases later became part of the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* litigation and were the only two cases in the *Brown* appeal where the plaintiffs prevailed in a lower-level court.

As part of a commemoration this past May of the 70th anniversary of the Brown case, the Delaware Judiciary re-enacted part of the testimony from the Belton case, with Chief Justice Seitz taking the role of his father and Delaware Supreme Court Justice N. Christopher Griffith playing the role of Louis Redding.

Collins J. Seitz, Jr. joined the Delaware Supreme Court as Justice in 2015 and was elevated to Chief Justice in 2019. He is currently president-elect of the Conference of Chief Justices, a part of the National Center for State Courts that represent the highest state judicial officers across the country and work on matters related to improving the administration of justice, rules, procedures and the operation of state courts.