



Retired Senator Tom and Ruth Harkin remember the life of the late Federal Court Judge Robert W. "Bob" Pratt, longtime friend and ally for justice

Retired Iowa Senator Tom and Ruth Harkin, along with the entire staff of [The Harkin Institute for Public Policy and Citizen Engagement at Drake University](#), are deeply saddened by the recent passing of retired Federal District Court Judge Robert W. "Bob" Pratt of Des Moines on January 28, 2026.

"Judge Pratt had what is needed in any person who sits in judgment on other people: a keen mind tempered by empathy; an unwavering commitment to the rule of law; life experiences that revealed the frailty of human nature; an understanding of the consequences of societal injustice and discrimination; and a profound faith in the redemptive power of individuals to change their lives for the better," said Senator Harkin.

"Bob brought all these qualities to bear during his tenure as a federal judge, and I personally saw these qualities in him when we were young attorneys in Polk County Legal Aid in the early 1970s. He and Rose Mary have remained our close friends ever since.

"I am honored and proud to have submitted his name to President Clinton as a Federal District Court Judge for Iowa. His example as a judge remains a polestar for future judicial appointees.

"Ruth and I send our condolences to his wife, our dear friend Rose Mary, and to all the family, and we thank them for Bob's life of service to our state and nation," Senator Harkin concluded.

Judge Pratt was instrumental in the establishment and success of The Harkin Institute and the completion of its home at Drake University, The Tom and Ruth Harkin Center, where he officiated numerous naturalization ceremonies for new US citizens, one of his great joys. He took seriously the words of the Federal Oath of Justices and Judges to "do equal right to the poor and to the rich" and lived by that command.

We at The Harkin Institute and Drake University join Senator and Mrs. Harkin in wishing the Pratt family comfort in this time of profound loss.



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About The Harkin Institute: The Harkin Institute for Public Policy & Citizen Engagement at Drake University builds on the legacy of former Iowa Senator Tom Harkin (retired) in the areas of wellness and nutrition, disability policy, and retirement security. It promises to improve the lives of all by giving policymakers access to high-quality information and engaging citizens as active participants in the formation of public policy. The Harkin Institute is housed at [The Tom and Ruth Harkin Center](#), among the most universally accessible buildings in the world, named in honor of the Harkins' shared commitment to public service.

