

“ The **POWER** I exert on the **COURT** depends on the power of my **ARGUMENTS**, not my **GENDER**. ”



BREAKING BARRIERS

FROM COWGIRL TO THE FIRST WOMAN TO SERVE ON THE SUPREME COURT

ON JULY 7, 1981, President Ronald Reagan announced he would nominate **SANDRA DAY O’CONNOR** to the U.S. Supreme Court. Forty years later, her impact on the court and the nation is as profound as it was groundbreaking.

KEY RULINGS

Writing 645 opinions in her 24 years on the court, Justice O’Connor was considered a moderate conservative. She cast the deciding vote in many important cases, including decisions on civil rights, voting rights, protection from discrimination and environmental issues.

- Planned Parenthood v. Casey (1992)**

Affirming the court’s 1973 decision in *Roe v. Wade*, O’Connor angered conservatives by joining the majority in protecting a woman’s right to choose. “Some of us as individuals find abortion offensive to our most basic principles of morality, but that cannot control our decision. Our obligation is to define the liberty of all, not to mandate our own moral code,” the opinion read.
- McConnell v. FEC (2003)**

The 5-4 decision found the McCain/Feingold campaign finance reform law constitutional.
- Grutter v. Bollinger (2003)**

In a 5-4 majority, the court upheld the constitutionality of a University of Michigan affirmative action program.
- McCreary Co. v. ACLU of Kentucky (2005)**

The court’s decision ruled Ten Commandments displays in several courthouses unconstitutional. O’Connor’s concurrence said, “Those who would renegotiate the boundaries between church and state must therefore answer a difficult question: Why would we trade a system that has served us so well for one that has served others so poorly?”



- Bush v. Gore (2000)**

With the presidency on the line, O’Connor acted as the swing vote in a 5-4 decision to uphold the Florida secretary of state’s original certification of Florida’s electoral votes. The decision affirmed George W. Bush as the nation’s 43rd president.
- Hamdi v. Rumsfeld (2004)**

A rebuttal of the Bush administration’s policy, the decision penned by O’Connor declared that citizens designated “enemy combatants” have the right to challenge their imprisonment “before a neutral decision maker.”

A LIFE OF FIRSTS

- MARCH 26, 1930**
Born in El Paso, Texas

SEPTEMBER 1946
Enrolls at Stanford University at 16

JUNE 18, 1950
Graduates from Stanford University with a degree in economics at 22

JUNE 15, 1952
Graduates from Stanford Law School

JUNE 1965
Begins work as Assistant Attorney General of Arizona

OCT. 30, 1969
Appointed and sworn in as Arizona State Senator for District 8-E

NOVEMBER 1972
Elected Majority Leader of Arizona State Senate, becoming the first woman to hold that position in any state senate in the country

JAN. 13, 1975
Sworn in as Maricopa County Superior Court Judge for Division 31

DEC. 3, 1979
Sworn in as Judge on the Arizona Court of Appeals for Division One

JULY 7, 1981
President Ronald Reagan announces O’Connor nomination to the Supreme Court, fulfilling campaign promise

AUG. 19, 1981
Reagan sends nomination to the U.S. Senate for review and approval

SEPT. 21, 1981
U.S. Senate confirms O’Connor as the next justice on the Supreme Court by unanimous 99-0 vote


SEPT. 25, 1981
Sworn in as Associate Justice of the United States Supreme Court





FOLLOWING IN HER FOOTSTEPS

O’Connor was the first of five women to serve on the Supreme Court. Here are the others in the court’s 232-year history:

- RUTH BADER GINSBURG**
Nominated by Bill Clinton
Served from Aug. 10, 1993, until her death Sept. 18, 2020


- SONIA SOTOMAYOR**
Nominated by Barack Obama
Began her term as an associate justice Aug. 8, 2009


- ELENA KAGAN**
Nominated by Barack Obama
Began her term as an associate justice Aug. 7, 2010


- AMY CONEY BARRETT**
Nominated by Donald Trump
Began her term as an associate justice Oct. 27, 2020

