

JRCLS Annual Broadcast

Justice Sandra Day O'Connor

Friday, February 15, 2008

7:00 p.m.

LDS Mormon Center
2100 California Circle
Rancho Cordova, CA 95670

Perhaps no other jurist could have come to the Supreme Court under greater expectations and scorn. When President Ronald Reagan nominated Sandra Day O'Connor in 1981 to be the first woman justice to sit on the Supreme Court, he did so out of an obligation to keep a campaign promise. O'Connor's nomination was quick to draw criticism from both the political left and right. Conservatives derided her lack of federal judicial experience and claimed she was lacking in constitutional knowledge. They considered her a wasted nomination and suspected her position on abortion. Liberals, on the other hand, could not deny their satisfaction at seeing a woman on the High Court, but they were dismayed at O'Connor's apparent lack of strong support for feminist issues.

In time, however, O'Connor has come to answer all these criticisms. O'Connor has emerged from the shadow of Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist and the Court's conservative bloc with her own brand of pragmatic and centrist-oriented conservatism. Even those liberals who branded her a "traitor" in her early years for compromising on abortion rights, now appreciate her efforts to keep the "pro-choice" message of *Roe v. Wade* (1973) alive. O'Connor's success should come at no surprise. From her rural childhood to her career climb through a profession dominated by men, O'Connor often resorted to practical solutions as she worked within the system. This tendency to moderate, in turn, enhanced her importance in an often-splintered Court.

