

# SJC chief nominee is a 'judge's judge'



FULL COURT PRESS

Bob McGOVERN

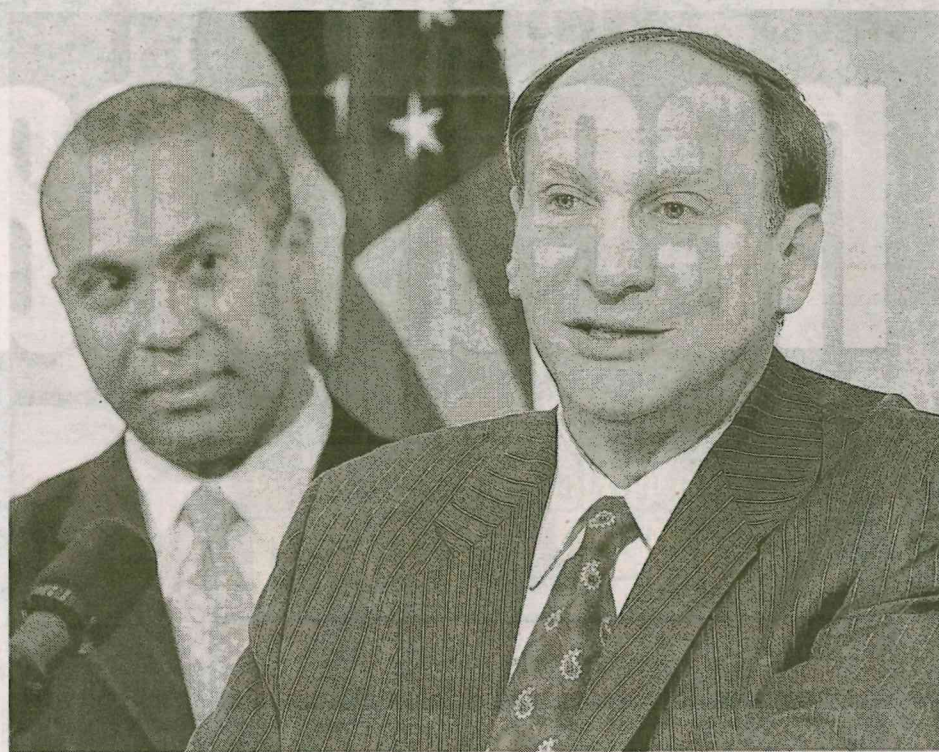
He's fought for veterans and opened the door for people priced out of the legal system, and now Judge Ralph Gants — called a judge's judge — could be

the state's next top jurist.

Gov. Deval Patrick recommended the 59-year-old Lexington man yesterday to take over for retiring Supreme Judicial Court Chief Justice Roderick Ireland, who will step down in July. The Governor's Council must still rule on the nomination.

"He's approachable, and that's important," said Massachusetts Bar Association President Douglas Sheff. "A lot of the time, judges think they're beyond reproach, but he's a guy who will pull you aside and have a genuine conversation. That's how I know him, and that's how others see him as well."

Gants — appointed by Patrick to the SJC in 2009 — has been instrumental in widening access to justice in Massachusetts. He was responsible for adding several SJC rules that help



AP FILE PHOTO

**'BRILLIANT JURIST':** Ralph Gants, right, and Gov. Deval Patrick at the State House in 2008, when Patrick nominated Gants to the Supreme Judicial Court. Yesterday, Patrick nominated him to be the court's chief justice.

directly fund legal services, Sheff said.

"I love all the things he has done for people. No one does more for people in need," he said. "There are few people as bright as him who are also so humble."

Patrick called Gants a sharp legal mind.

"It is my great honor to nominate Ralph D. Gants to serve as the chief justice of the Supreme Judicial

court," Patrick said. "Justice Gants is a brilliant jurist with a passion for justice and a keen understanding that the law needs to make sense in the lives of real people."

Gants grew up in New Rochelle, N.Y., and graduated from Harvard Law School. Prior to his time on the bench, Gants was a special assistant to then-FBI director William Webster.

He later became a prosecutor in the U.S. attorney's office in Boston.

A judge in some capacity since then-Gov. William Weld appointed him to Superior Court in 1997, Gants was also instrumental in the legislative effort to expand Massachusetts housing courts across the state by July 1, 2015.

He also had an access-to-justice question added to the Massachusetts Bar Exam in an effort to teach newly minted attorneys that some people can't afford their day in court.

"Justice Gants has long been a champion for access to justice and pro bono work," said Boston Bar Association President Paul T. Dacier, in a statement, "and has made these a priority since his appointment to the Supreme Judicial Court as an Associate Justice in 2009."

— bob.mcGovern@bostonherald.com

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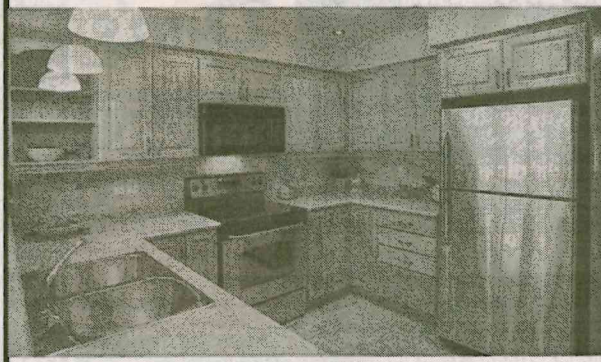
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