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In 1990, she was elected to Division II of the Circuit Court of Tennessee for the Thirtieth Judicial District at Memphis where she served for six years. In December, 1996, she was appointed to the Supreme Court of Tennessee by Governor Don Sundquist and was elected to eight-year terms in August 1998 and in August 2006. On September 2, 2008, she was sworn in as the Supreme Court's first female Chief Justice, a position she held until September 1, 2010.

She has received the Sam A. Myar, Jr. Award for Outstanding Service to the Legal Profession and the Community, the Divorce and Family Law Section's Judge of the Year Award from the Memphis Bar Association, the 1999 Marion Griffin-Frances Loring Award from the Association for Women Attorneys, the Chancellor Charles A. Rond Outstanding Jurist Award from the Young Lawyers Section of the Memphis Bar Association, the 2008 Grayfred Gray Public Service Mediation Award from the Coalition for Mediation Awareness in Tennessee, the 2009 Jurist of the Year Award from the Southeastern Region of the American Board of Trial Advocates [SEABOTA], the 2009 W.J. Michael Cody Pro Bono Attorney of the Year Award from Memphis Area Legal Services, and the Tennessee Bar Association 2013 Frank F. Drowota III Outstanding Judicial Service Award.