



# The Sacramento Bee

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## A quiet farewell from U.S. attorney

Charles Stevens kept a low-profile style

By Denny Walsh  
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U.S. Attorney Charles "Chuck" Stevens, the quintessential quiet man at the helm of turbulent cases from Unabom to narcotics trafficking, is leaving office much the way he came in.

Without fanfare, Stevens notified U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno Monday of his decision to step down.



His office issued a simple two-page press release announcing the imminent departure of Stevens, who hopes to vacate the \$115,000-a-year post by the end of April.

"I've hit the point of diminishing returns, both in terms of what I can contribute to the office and what I can derive professionally from the opportunity," Stevens said in an interview Friday.

"I'm a facilitator here — a point guard if you will," he added in typically modest fashion. "I don't do the scoring. We have a marvelous stable of talent for that."

Stevens, who turned 40 on New Year's Eve, said he is weighing a number of "private sector options," including a lucrative offer to return to Los Angeles-based Gibson Dunn & Crutcher in its San Francisco office.

While he has a lot of friends there and a warm spot in his heart for the private law firm, Stevens said he and his wife, Ann, "strongly prefer to stay in Sacramento."

They see the capital as a good place to raise their two girls and two boys, who range in age from 4

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## Stevens: His office prosecuted hate crimes, set up task force

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to 12, and are reluctant to leave behind friends, professional ties and community involvements.

Sacramento Federal Defender Quin Denvir, who represents Unabomber suspect Theodore Kaczynski, said Stevens will be "sorely missed."

"Unlike most lawyers, he seems to have no ego about himself and his work," Denvir said. "But I've seen his work. He's good."

Denvir is not alone in those sentiments. Members of the legal community and federal investigative agents give Stevens universally high marks for his job performance.

The Sacramento-based Eastern District of California, over which Stevens presides, is the eighth most populous of the nation's 94 federal judicial districts. It covers 34 counties with 6 million residents scattered across 87,000 square miles from Oregon to Los Angeles and Nevada to the coastal range.

It has 61 attorneys, divided between here and Fresno, who prosecute violations of federal crimes as well as civil lawsuits that run the gamut from environmental enforcement to asset forfeiture.

Stevens points with pride to his office's prosecution of hate crimes — including white supremacists' attacks on African American families in two north Sacramento County communities — as well as the development of a task force aimed at hate crimes.

"It is a model of multilevel cooperation," he said, "and has proved extremely valuable in addressing minorities' concerns."

"I feel good and proud and believe we've made a real difference. I like reading about it in the paper and I like talking to my children about it."

Under Stevens' leadership, the office also formed a strike team targeting repeat offenders responsible for a lot of violent crime.

In addition to taking hundreds of dangerous criminals off the streets of Sacramento, Fresno, San Joaquin, Yuba and Sutter counties, the team's efforts have resulted in excellent working rela-

tionships among federal and local law enforcement agencies, Stevens said.

While it has not received the statewide media attention of its predecessor corruption scandal at the Capitol, an ongoing FBI investigation in the Fresno-Clovis area and resulting series of prosecutions personally headed up by Stevens have thus far bagged four former city councilmen, an influential lobbyist, two prominent developers, a real estate broker and others.

Another successful venture launched during Stevens' tenure is the Medlaw Project. The brainchild of Assistant U.S. Attorney Daniel Linhardt, it has identified more than 500 lawyers, medical professionals and administrators in a fraudulent health care scheme involving kickbacks, false claims and tax evasion.

Yet, throughout his 3½ years in office, Stevens has shunned personal attention.

The swearing in of a U.S. attorney is traditionally a courtroom event attended by judges and magistrates, court staff, and invited family and friends.

By contrast, at the end of November 1993 Stevens drove alone to Fresno to be sworn in on an interim basis by the district's then-Chief Judge Robert E. Coyle. Only when he arrived did he learn that the U.S. Senate had confirmed his appointment by President Clinton and the induction would be permanent.

The ceremony took place in the judge's chambers, with Coyle's secretary as a witness.

"I wanted to take a low profile," said Stevens. "I didn't take this job to make a public name for myself. An elaborate public swearing-in would have cut the other way."

That's not to say he's been inaccessible. Quite the contrary. Because he feels strongly that the public should be informed about the workings of his office, he has always been available to answer questions.

There is no better evidence of Stevens' self-effacing approach than the fact there has been no

press conferences in Sacramento regarding the prosecution of Kaczynski.

It is the only case in federal court here to attract intense national media attention during Stevens' time in office, and he is one of the case's supervisors.

He is quick to point out that the prosecution team is comprised of individuals from five jurisdictions.

"A press conference would suggest I was somehow claiming credit for what we are doing," he said. "It would really be a self-serving exercise."

"The public lost so much confidence in the criminal justice system over the O.J. thing, I wanted to show it can be done effectively without engaging in public grandstanding."

The handful of Stevens press conferences were to announce undertakings broader in scope than an individual prosecution, such as his initiatives against violent crime and health care fraud.

A third-generation native of Cranford, N. J. and a third generation lawyer, Stevens came west to study law at the University of California, Berkeley.

One reason his time in office has been so memorable is he has not been just a U.S. attorney. Out of the 94 in the country, he is one of 14 who sit on the Attorney General's Advisory Committee.

"We serve essentially as an executive committee advising the attorney general on federal law enforcement matters," Stevens explained.

"When I sit across from the attorney general once a month in a conference room that was Bobby Kennedy's office and offer my views and advice, I always ask myself, 'How in the world have you ended up here?' I have never taken it for granted and I will never forget it."

Asked how Reno reacted to the news that he is leaving, he described her as "disappointed but supportive."

His service as U.S. attorney has been "a once-in-a-lifetime experience," Stevens said. "I wouldn't trade it for anything."