



Hon. Michael T. Liburdi

Judge, U.S. District Court for the District of Arizona

by Tatum Weight Chinchén



Tatum Weight Chinchén externed for Hon. Michael T. Liburdi while a law student at Arizona State University's Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law. She then clerked for Judge Liburdi in 2024-2025. © 2025 Tatum Weight Chinchén. All rights reserved.

Born in Scranton, Penn., in 1977, Judge Michael T. Liburdi moved a few years later to Arizona with his parents. Like many families at the time, they relocated west in search of a better climate and better opportunities. The move to Arizona marked the beginning of a life in the desert, where Liburdi's career in politics, law, and public service would take shape.

Liburdi grew up in Cave Creek, Arizona. He attended Cactus Shadows High School, where he was involved in the school's journalism and yearbook programs. Liburdi's interest in politics began with the 1992 presidential election—an historic race between an incumbent president, a third-party billionaire, and a charismatic Southern governor. Still a teenager, Liburdi followed the election and media coverage closely, marking the start of what would be a lifelong engagement with the law and policy.

As an undergraduate, Judge Liburdi focused on pre-law studies, earning his Bachelor of Science, *summa cum laude*, from Arizona State University (ASU) in 1998. Unsurprisingly, his collegiate experience centered around active participation in legal policy. As an intern at the Arizona Legislature, he had his first in-depth exposure as to how laws are written, debated, and shaped in real time.

After graduating a semester early, Liburdi went to work for a government affairs firm, where his interest in election law and politics matured. Having been set on law school from a young age, Liburdi took the LSAT and enrolled at ASU's Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law. There, Liburdi distinguished himself in both leadership and scholarship. He served on the *Arizona State Law Journal* and found particular interest in constitutional law courses taught by renowned faculty such as Paul Bender and James Weinstein.

During law school, Liburdi served as an elected member of the ASU Student Government, where he led a bold initiative to overhaul the student governance structure. With the help of his colleagues, Liburdi successfully sponsored a referendum to dissolve the ASU student government. He then presided over a constitutional convention and implemented a broader governance model, including more representation for



graduate students and a board dedicated to student programs and activities. These reforms largely remain in place to this day. When fondly recalling this accomplishment, Liburdi was quick to credit his classmates and note that he was but one “brainchild” of many to rethink and reshape student government.

Receiving his J.D. in 2002, Liburdi went on to clerk for then-Vice Chief Justice Ruth McGregor of the Arizona Supreme Court—an experience that left a lasting impression. This was Liburdi's first glimpse into how judges think, work, and lead. Years later, that insight would shape how he advised the governor on judicial appointments and how he would later approach his own role on the bench.

Liburdi then entered private practice at Brown & Bain, which later became the Phoenix office of Perkins Coie, where he worked on complex commercial litigation, antitrust, and securities fraud cases. He credits this period with sharpening his ability to learn quickly and write clearly—essential skills for both lawyers and judges. After several years in private practice, Liburdi joined Snell & Wilmer, where he helped establish and grow a successful political law practice.

Having exposure to the legislative and judicial branches of government, Liburdi decided it was time to see what the executive branch had to offer. From



Top left: At the investiture ceremony for Arizona Court of Appeals Judge Chris Staring in February 2016—(l to r) now Arizona Supreme Court Justice Kathryn King, Congressman Juan Ciscomani, Judge Staring, Judge Liburdi, and Becky Barry, who is Congressman Ciscomani's Chief of Staff. Bottom left: Attorney Tim Berg introduces Michael Liburdi as a new member of the Uniform Laws Commission on July 14, 2017.



2015–2018, he served as general counsel to Arizona Governor Doug Ducey, a role he assumed after advising the governor's campaign and transition teams. A natural people person, Liburdi enjoyed being the liaison between the Governor's Office and the Arizona judiciary, forging relationships with various justices, judges, and legislators across the state. He advised the governor on judicial appointments, one of the

most significant being the appointment of public-interest lawyer Clint Bolick to the Arizona Supreme Court. Another of his proudest achievements during this period was assisting the governor in negotiating a bipartisan settlement in a long-running public school funding case, which ultimately led to a remarkable increase in state financial support for public schools.

Judge Liburdi credits a wide range of mentors and colleagues for helping him reach the federal bench. He was appointed by President Trump in 2019, and he brings a wealth of experience from all branches of government to his courtroom. "Writing is so important," he often says, urging litigators to be concise, transparent about legal weaknesses, and grounded in sound authority. He emphasizes that courtroom presentation is merely the tip of

the iceberg. It is the work behind the scenes that matters, and judges notice when litigators are well-prepared.

Intellectually curious by nature, Judge Liburdi finds daily excitement in the breadth of cases on his docket. He especially welcomes the challenge of mastering criminal law. Judge Liburdi also enjoys presiding over jury trials. He finds value not only in the legal resolution of a dispute but in observing the transformative process jurors themselves endure. "Many begin *voir dire* reluctant to serve," he observes, "but by the time the selected jurors deliberate, they are deeply engaged with the case and find the experience to be valuable." Judge Liburdi never misses the opportunity to meet with the jurors at the conclusion of a trial and personally thank them for their civic service.

Liburdi is also heavily involved in the Ninth Circuit's judicial conference planning committee, and in 2026, he will take on the role of conference chair. He has enjoyed building relationships with judges, court executive staff, and lawyer representatives from the circuit and different districts, while also planning unique programs for the circuit conference.

Judge Liburdi finds tremendous fulfillment in mentoring his law clerks and externs, considering it one of the most meaningful aspects of his role. His chambers are always staffed to maximum capacity with externs, not just to keep the wheels turning, but because he genuinely values the opportunity to invest in others' careers. Whether it's a lunch trip with chambers staff to Chick-fil-A or an impromptu story, Liburdi is always ready with a personal anecdote or wise word. His approachable nature and steady encouragement make his chambers a

place of learning and lasting connection.

When he is off the bench, Judge Liburdi enjoys traveling with his family, especially heading back to Pennsylvania. Both he and his wife love touring state capitol buildings, taking in the unique history and architecture.

Through every phase of his career—from student leader, to law clerk, to governor’s counsel and now federal judge—Michael Liburdi has combined a sharp legal mind with a consistent commitment to public service. Innately personable, he thrives on building relationships, mentoring the next generation of lawyers, and staying engaged with the legal community. In his words and in his work, Judge Liburdi reflects the belief that the law is a living discipline, shaped not only by doctrine, but by people, principles, and public trust. ☺



At Judge Liburdi's swearing in to the federal bench on Aug. 13, 2019—(l to r) Judge Liburdi's father, Governor Ducey, and Judge Liburdi.

A large image showing a stack of colorful folders or papers, with the colors transitioning from light blue and white on the left to yellow, orange, and red on the right. The folders are stacked in a way that creates a sense of depth and movement.

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