

## The Presentation of the 2026 Distinguished Service Award Professor S. Elizabeth Gibson

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The American College of Bankruptcy announced the presentation of its 2026 Distinguished Service Award to Professor S. Elizabeth Gibson, the Burton Craige Professor of Law, Emerita at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Law. Professor Gibson will receive the award on March 20, 2026 in San Antonio, Texas at the induction of the Class 37 Fellows. The award will be presented on behalf of the College by Professor Melissa Jacoby.

The Distinguished Service Award is the highest honor of the College. Criteria for the award include: significant accomplishments in improving the administration of justice in the insolvency and bankruptcy field; distinguished service consistently rendered over a considerable period of time or a single outstanding achievement in a particular year; accomplishments arising from voluntary activities as opposed to services rendered to a client as a paid professional; membership in the College; and distinguished in the fellow's institution in a manner and in matters that are consistent with the goals and purposes of the College.

Professor Gibson is a member of Class XIV (2003). She has served the legal community for the past 49 years, with the overwhelming majority of that time being devoted to the bankruptcy field and the individuals and businesses affected by it. Professor Gibson's teaching, scholarship and service over many years have benefited judges, practitioners and her fellow academics.



Professor Gibson received her Juris Doctor in 1976 with highest distinction from the institution where she spent her academic career – UNC. After law school, Professor Gibson clerked for Judge J. Braxton of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 4<sup>th</sup> Circuit and Justice Byron White of the U.S. Supreme Court. She practiced law at Shea & Gardner (now Goodwin Proctor) in Washington, D.C., where she was made a partner, prior to joining the faculty at UNC.

Professor Gibson's teaching and research interests include bankruptcy, civil procedure and federal jurisdiction. She is the author of numerous monographs and articles on jurisdictional issues in bankruptcy, including removal, jury trials and sovereign immunity, and the use of bankruptcy to resolve mass torts. Her work has appeared in numerous law reviews. She is a member of the Board of Editors for *Collier on Bankruptcy*, the National Bankruptcy Conference and the American College of Bankruptcy. Gibson

served for many years as the Reporter for the Advisory Committee on Bankruptcy Rules and as Reporter for the Committee on the Administration of the Bankruptcy System for the Judicial Conference of the United States.

Professor Gibson has received many distinguished honors, appointments, and recognitions for her teaching and writings. President Clinton nominated her to the United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit in 2000 but, unfortunately, for the judiciary and the public, her nomination expired without action being taken by the U.S. Senate.

Professor Gibson not only has produced significant scholarship during her career, but has taken the time to make that research and writing accessible to judges and professionals throughout the country. She has spoken at professional and judicial conferences and seminars throughout her esteemed career, including at the College's Annual Meeting in March 2004 shortly after being elected as a Fellow. Her scholarship and other academic work have an enduring quality and remain very relevant and useful to the bankruptcy community. As one of the foremost experts on the intersection of bankruptcy and federal courts, her careful analysis of the constitutional authority of bankruptcy courts, jury trials, and sovereign immunity remain classics in the field. As an illustration of her public spirit, a significant portion of her original research and analysis on the treatment of mass torts in bankruptcy was published as Federal Judicial Center manuals, making them available to any and all readers: *Judicial Management of Mass Tort Bankruptcy Cases* (FJC 2005) (162 pp.) and *Case Studies of Mass Tort Limited Fund Class Action Settlements and Bankruptcy Reorganizations* (FJC 2000) (244 pp.). These

frequently cited books are prescient in their identification of legal and constitutional challenges and questions that remain critical two decades later.

The letters in support of Gibson's nomination for this award were effusive about her as a scholar ("an intellectual powerhouse") and her exceptional character ("She is gracious, charming, and genuinely cares about the well-being of those around her"). She has no less than six bankruptcy judges who were her former students. To a person, she inspired and mentored them both during law school and in their professional careers. As one of the judges noted – "It is difficult to know where to begin with an icon like Professor Gibson." While she has a collection of adoring judges who were fortunate to have taken her courses in law school, in many ways, every bankruptcy judge in the Country for generations has been her student. Her impact through her Federal Judicial Center service has been far reaching and impactful. And, as one supporter noted:

"My favorite two quotes about Elizabeth:

- "If she didn't exist, the courts would have to create her."
- "She is almost always the smartest person in the room, but she doesn't ever act like she knows that."

Professor Gibson's range of contributions to our profession can hardly be captured in this short article. It is with overwhelming admiration and awe that the College acknowledges one of its own by adding her to the list of outstanding bankruptcy professionals who have preceded her with recognition of this year's Distinguished Service Award. ¶