



U.S. Commission on Civil Rights Mourns the Passing of Abigail Thernstrom

April 17, 2020

Today, the Commission mourns the passage of Abigail Thernstrom. She served as a member of this Commission from 2001 to 2013 and as its Vice Chair from 2004 to 2013.

“Throughout her illustrious career, Thernstrom was a tireless champion for the principle of equal justice for all,” said Gail Heriot, a member of the Commission who served with Commissioner Thernstrom from 2007 to 2013.

“Abby Thernstrom was an intellectual powerhouse whose scholarship on voting rights, education, and race made vital contributions to fashioning public policy. Her voice on these issues will be sorely missed,” said Peter Kirsanow, another Commissioner who served with Thernstrom from 2001 to 2013.

Commissioner Michael Yaki said “Abigail was a colleague of many years but also my closest friend on the Commission. Despite the fact that our views could be, in her words, miles apart, we also shared a commitment to the ongoing mission of the Commission and often found common ground that enabled us to partner together on important civil rights issues of our time. I shall miss her wit, her intellect, her humanity, but most of all, her friendship.”

At the time of her passing, Thernstrom was an adjunct scholar at the American Enterprise Institute. She was previously a Senior Fellow at the Manhattan Institute and a member of the Massachusetts Board of Education. Thernstrom received her Ph.D. from the Department of Government at Harvard University in 1975.

Thernstrom was the author of *Voting Rights and Wrongs: The Elusive Quest for Racially Fair Elections* (AEI Press, June 2009). She was the co-author, with her husband, Harvard historian Stephan Thernstrom, of *No Excuses: Closing the Racial Gap in Learning* (Simon & Schuster, October 2003), which was awarded the 2007 Fordham Foundation prize “for distinguished scholarship,” and was named by both the Los Angeles Times and the American School Board Journal as one of the best books of 2003.

The Thernstroms also collaborated on *America in Black and White: One Nation, Indivisible* (Simon & Schuster), which the New York Times Book Review, in its annual end-of-the-year issue, named as one of the notable books of 1997.

Thernstrom's 1987 book, *Whose Votes Count? Affirmative Action and Minority Voting Rights* (Harvard University Press) won four awards, including the American Bar Association's Certificate of Merit, and the Anisfield-Wolf prize for the best book on race and ethnicity. It was named the best policy studies book of that year by the Policy Studies Organization (an affiliate of the American Political Science Association), and won the Benchmark Book Award from the Center for Judicial Studies.

In 2007, the Thernstroms (along with James Q. Wilson, Martin Feldstein, and John Bolton), were the recipients of a Bradley Foundation prize for Outstanding Intellectual Achievement.

The Commission recognizes Vice Chair Thernstrom's distinguished career of scholarship and public service. We mourn her loss, commemorate her life, and extend our condolences to her family and friends.