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# Remembering Elizabeth "Betty" Weaver

By [JACK LESSENBERRY \(/PEOPLE/JACK-LESSENBERRY\)](#) • APR 23, 2015

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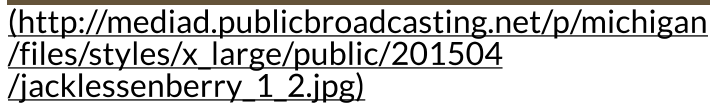
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*Jack Lessenberry looks back at the career of Former Michigan Supreme Court Justice Elizabeth "Betty" Weaver*

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We don't know exactly where she died or the cause of death; in fact, we were never quite certain about her age. All we seem to know is that a funeral home in Traverse City said that they had her body, and that

her family doesn't want any services.

Betty Weaver was anything but predictable. She was a woman from Louisiana who moved to Northern Michigan when she was in her thirties and already a lawyer. She soon was elected a probate judge in Leelanau County, where she became noticed and won praise for her efforts on behalf of children in the judicial system, possibly the least controversial thing about her.

Today you can read mild praise for her from politicians and fellow justices, mostly Republicans.

Most of those statements are basically insincere. They loathed her, and she loathed nearly all of them, including Governor Snyder.

I know, because she told me so, in a long and rambling phone call one Halloween night a few years ago. She wanted to enlist my energies in helping to destroy them.

She was a bundle of contradictions; a Republican who came to hate her fellow Republicans on the court; a woman who crusaded for justice and who secretly taped her colleagues' conversations in order to successfully embarrass them.

She was first elected to the high court in 1994, and was unanimously elected chief justice five years later. Yet there were questions about her administrative competence, and her colleagues refused to reelect her chief two years later.

After that, she seemed to change. During her last years on the court, her behavior seemed to become more bizarre. She attacked her fellow Republicans as

"Engler's Gang of Four," after the governor who appointed them.

Embarrassing fights broke out in which she savaged her colleagues, and at least one made fun in public of the way she dressed and spoke.

When Chief Justice Cliff Taylor was unexpectedly defeated in 2008, she crossed over to help Democrats elect Marilyn Kelly as chief. Twice Weaver announced she was going to retire from the court and didn't.

Five years ago, she announced she would run for reelection as an independent – and then suddenly quit, apparently after working out a deal with then-Governor Granholm to replace her with northern Michigan Democrat Alton Davis, who ended up being defeated that fall.

Weaver then wrote a nearly 800-page book called "Judicial Deceit," blasting her colleagues, and calling for court reform and eliminating partisanship and secret money from judicial elections. Not all her ideas were bad, or her criticism wrong.

But her flamboyance distracted from her points.

Betty Weaver had much worth saying, but the way she said it caused many to tune her out. That may be

worth remembering most of all.

*Jack Lessenberry is Michigan Radio's political analyst. Views expressed in his essays are his own and do not necessarily reflect those of Michigan Radio, its management or the station licensee, The University of Michigan.*

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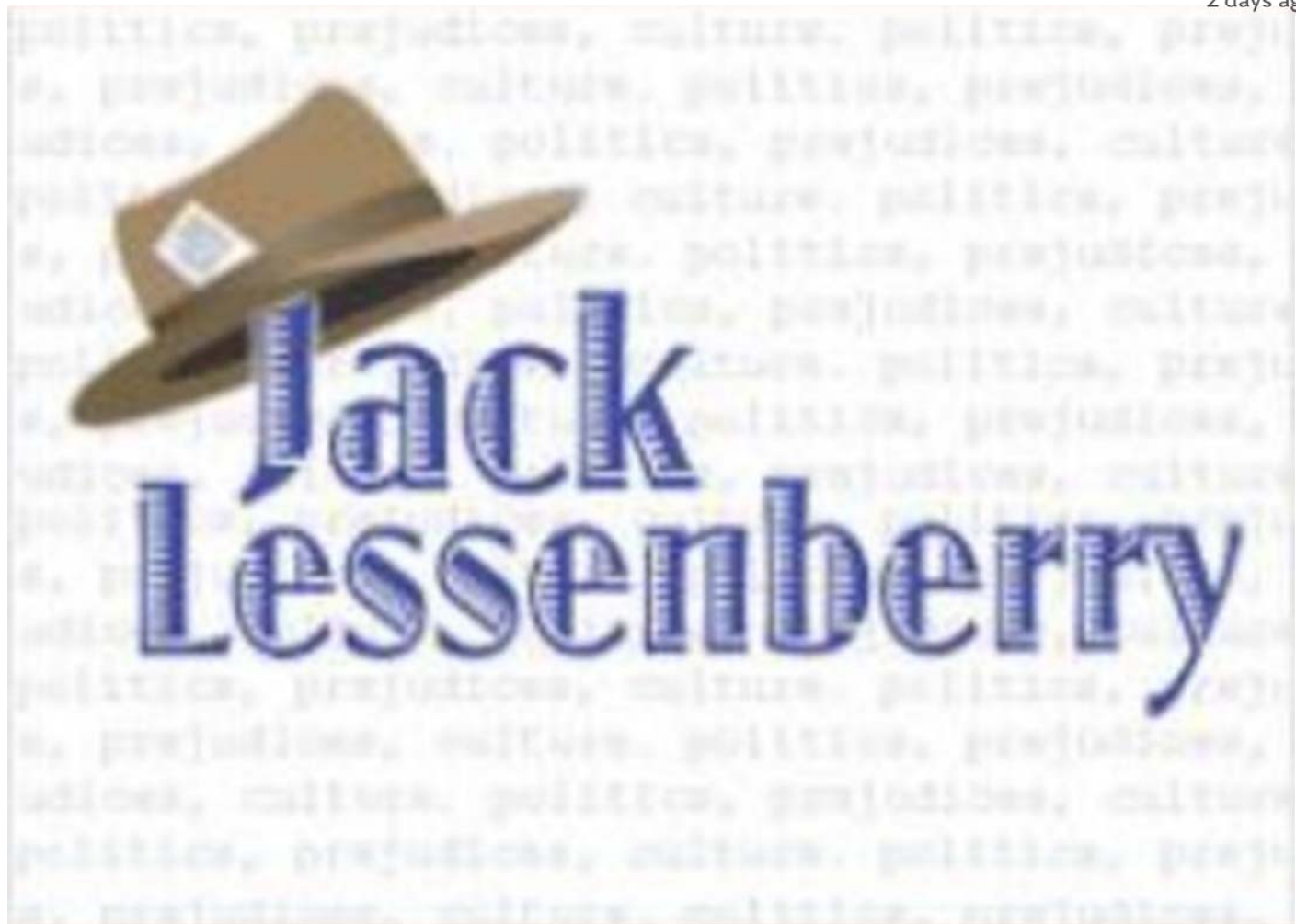
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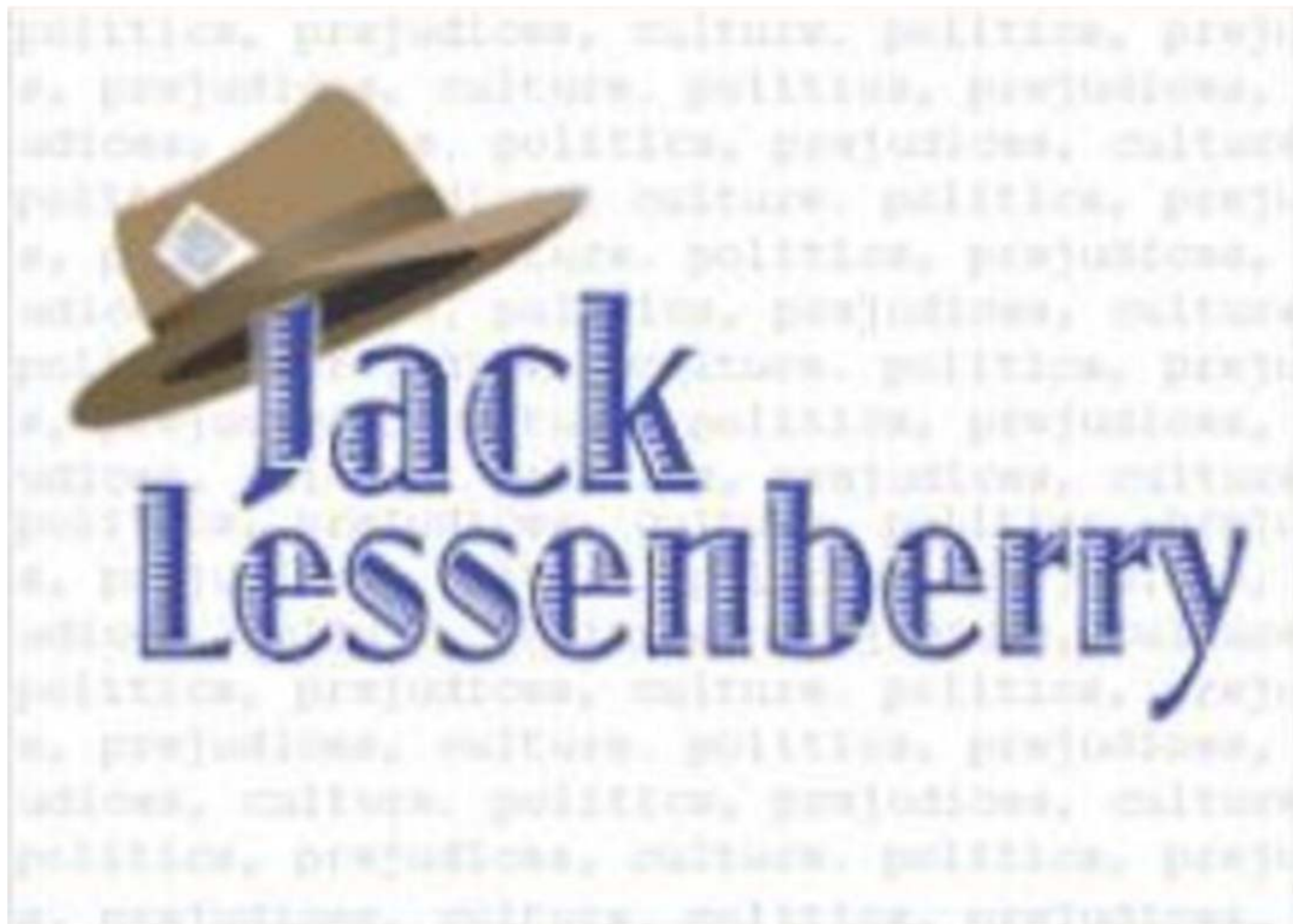
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