

# The Washington Post

## Chief Justice Roberts reports for jury duty in a Maryland court



Chief Justice John Roberts speaks with Britain's Prince Charles, right, during a reception at the British Ambassador's Residence in this March 18 photo in Washington. Roberts showed up for jury duty in Rockville on Wednesday. (Andrew Harnik/AP)

By Dan Morse and Robert Barnes April 15

One potential juror who was considered for a civil trial in Montgomery County on Wednesday morning could have brought a lot to the jury room. He's the chief justice of the United States.

John G. Roberts Jr. showed up for jury duty in Rockville like other civic-minded citizens and was being considered for a civil trial in a case involving a car crash. He answered two questions in open court about relatives — noting that his sister in Indiana is a nurse, and his brother-in-law was with Indiana State Police — but none about his own line of work, which would be listed on a questionnaire. He then talked with attorneys and the judge privately at the bench.

Roberts was not selected, and left court without comment.

Justices are often called for jury duty — Justice Elena Kagan has been to the courthouse in the District at least twice — but rarely chosen. Roberts, who lives in Chevy Chase, was being considered for a two-day trial.

It was difficult to notice Roberts's presence in the 7th floor courtroom, save for two serious looking security men in suits posted at the door. The chief justice took a seat in the second row of the gallery, squeezed into a packed courtroom with about 50 other juror prospects.

Circuit Judge Ronald Rubin told the crowd about the matter before them: A lawsuit, involving a wreck on Connecticut Avenue in 2013.

Rubin eventually asked people to raise their hands if they were involved in certain professions or were close to people involved in those professions. When the topic turned to medicine, Roberts spoke up.

“Juror 49,” he began. “My sister is a nurse.”

Rubin asked for a few more details and got them — she lived in Indiana, with a specialty of cardiology. Then Rubin asked the highest ranking member of his profession a question he obviously knew by rote: “Would that in any way make it difficult or impossible for you to be fair and impartial?”

“Nope,” the chief justice said.

Rubin moved on to whether panelists knew people involved in the accident investigation field.

Several prospects answered, including Roberts, who told Rubin about his brother-in-law. Rubin again asked if that would keep him from being fair and impartial.

“No sir,” Roberts said.

The judge – Rubin – moved on to questions about whether anyone had been in a bad accident. A man in the back said he'd totaled his dad's Volvo as a teenager. Rubin asked if he was OK, heard that he was, and started an exchange that had Roberts and his other juror candidates laughing.

“Did you work it out with him?” Rubin asked.

“I had to work at a Cheesecake Factory for a couple of summers,” Juror No. 54 said.

Minutes later, Rubin asked No. 49 to step to the bench, asking the lawyers in the case to join them for a quiet conversation out of the presence of the other prospective jurors. It seemed clear what Rubin was doing: He was about to ask the panelists if they had any experience as a lawyer or close connections to lawyers, and Rubin wanted to save Roberts from having to answer in the detailed affirmative in front of everyone else.

“Sir, good morning. How are you?” Rubin asked No 49.

“Very good, thank you,” No. 49 said.

“I've discussed this with counsel. Obviously we know what you do for a living, sir.”

The huddle quickly concluded, and Roberts was allowed to remain silent during the lawyers question.

That Roberts wasn't selected could have had as much to do with his juror number as anything.

After taking into consideration which jurors attorneys wanted stricken, Rubin went in numerical order. The panelists selected – six for the trial, with two alternates -- started at No. 2 and ended at No. 14.

The high court resumes oral arguments Monday.