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Can justice be accomplished in a courtroom where there is no place to sit? That was the perplexing question that faced the Nevada Supreme Court in 1902 when Samuel Post Davis, controller for the State of Nevada, refused to pay the bill for chairs the Supreme Court had ordered.

Davis was a colorful personality, even in a state full of characters as turn of the century Nevada. Born in Connecticut in 1850, Davis was lured to the west by the excitement and adventure of the frontier and eventually found his way into politics, serving two terms as the state controller for Nevada from 1899 to 1907.

Given his humorous and somewhat irreverent disposition, one can rather easily imagine a certain devilishness at work when Davis, as state controller, steadfastly refused to pay the bill for the chairs the Nevada Supreme Court had ordered for its courtroom. As Davis may have privately hoped, it wasn't long before the Nevada Supreme Court found itself in the ironic position of deciding whether it had the authority to order the chairs which were, by then, already installed.

It is unlikely that Davis was surprised by the outcome of the debate when the Nevada Supreme Court issued its opinion in April of 1902. The Court cited its inherent powers and ordered Davis to pay for the furnishings immediately from the balance in an account appropriated by the legislature for the payment of current expenses. Nonetheless, the Justices' legal predicament most assuredly provided Davis with a few after-dinner stories.

Narrator: Senator Richard Bryan. A native Nevadan, United States Senator Richard Bryan studied at the University of Nevada at Reno before earning his law degree at Hastings College of Law in San Francisco. Senator Bryan began his career as a Nevada lawyer working as a Deputy District Attorney in Clark County and later became Clark County's first Public Defender. Senator Bryan's first elected state-wide position was in the Nevada State Assembly (1969-1972) where he served until he was elected to the Nevada State Senate in 1973. Continuing his distinguished political career in Nevada, Senator Bryan next took office as Nevada's Attorney General (1979-1983), a position he held until he was elected Governor of Nevada (1983-1989). Upon his 1989 election to the United States Senate Bryan (1989-2001) assumed leadership of the Consumer Subcommittee of the Senate Commerce Committee, a rare honor for a newly elected Senator. He also served as Chairman of the Senate Ethics Committee.

Photograph of Sam Davis from his *History of Nevada*, courtesy of the Nevada State Library and Archives.

Photograph of the interior of the State Controller's Office courtesy of the Nevada State Museum. Davis is standing behind the counter on the left.

[Ten Famous Cases of the Nevada Supreme Court, 1865-1937](#)