A Justice John Paul Stevens’ judicial legacy is the fact that he’s responsible for many of the Court’s most influential environmental decisions over the past several decades.

Chief Justice John Roberts spoke. He had no idea what the future held. It was the last day of the Supreme Court’s current term, and he was a temporary replacement for Justice John Paul Stevens, whose retirement took the Court back to a 4-4 split in environmental cases.

In 2005, Justice Stevens wrote the majority opinion in the Kelo v. City of New London case. The Court ruled 5-4 that a city could use its power of eminent domain to take private property for a public use, thereby allowing the city to build a redevelopment project.

Environmental advocates are understandably glum at the prospect of Justice Stevens leaving the Court, especially after the past few months of major environmental decisions issued by the majority. But perhaps the single most significant aspect of historical jurisprudence under Justice Stevens is his unequivocal statement in the decision’s first paragraph that climate change is a clear and present environmental danger facing our nation and planet.

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