
A PERSONAL SALUTE TO A GREAT DEAN AND GOOD FRIEND

*The Honorable Nathaniel R. Jones**

In reviewing the remarkable career of Joseph P. Tomain as dean at the University of Cincinnati College of Law, the first thought that scrolls across the screen of my memory is the realization that I was virtually present at its creation. This arises from the fact that I was invited to offer an assessment of him during the dean search that took place in the mid-1990s. He had been plucked from his professorship to serve as Interim Dean. As the search for a permanent dean intensified, it became apparent to the search committee that the most logical person was actually occupying the Dean's chair in an interim capacity. It was then that Joe Tomain was selected to become the dean. From the time he was chosen until he stepped down in 2004, it was my pleasure both to observe and to work with him as he carried out his responsibilities.

My observation was informed, to a considerable extent, by the insight I gained into legal education from serving on the American Bar Association Law School Accreditation Committee. That experience provided me a benchmark for evaluating the performance of law school administrators, and specifically that of Dean Tomain. From my duties on the ABA Committee, I studied scores of deans and their performance at leading law schools across the country.

It is against that background that I measure Dean Tomain. I rank him as not only a first-class administrator, but also one who combined solid legal teaching gifts. Those assets place him at the top tier of where one finds many law school deans. That is by no means the full story of Dean Tomain's contributions to the University of Cincinnati College of Law and its students.

What separates and distinguishes Joe Tomain are the contributions over and above the commonplace. He moved students to respond by raising the bar and enriching their law school experience. These things he did largely by example and exhortation. Not only did he involve himself in a number of community activities, he took steps, both dramatic and subtle, to bring greater racial, ethnic, and gender diversity to the law school and to the Bar. The civic life of Cincinnati engaged him, and he responded with enthusiasm and conviction.

Dean Tomain went beyond the campus and the local community and

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took the American lessons of inclusion internationally. Most notably, I recall the role he played as an election observer of South Africa's first free election that saw Nelson Mandela chosen President of South Africa.

My appreciation for this phase of Dean Tomain's activities embraces a deep and abiding personal approbation. At his persistent urging I agreed to turn over my personal papers to the law school. They are now known as "The Nathaniel R. Jones Collection" and occupy a section of the law library. To commemorate the occasion, an impressive dinner was sponsored and drew over one thousand guests. A highlight was the presence of a jurist from South Africa's Constitutional Court, the Honorable Johann C. Kriegler, who brought a personal greeting and congratulations from President Mandela.

Dean Tomain was and is a true law teacher. He continues to probe the philosophical and moral basis of the law and strives to help all of us gain a better understanding of law and the relevance of the legal system to our lives. If we would but listen to and learn from Dean Tomain, we stand to become better people.

By designating my great and good friend as Dean Emeritus, the University of Cincinnati College of Law does itself proud. And most assuredly, those lawyers who were educated on his watch are richer for the exposure.