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TRIBUTE TO DEAN RENNARD STRICKLAND

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A few years ago, the search for the new dean of the University of Oregon School of Law was scheduled soon for completion. This would be a critical moment for the University and the School of Law: a new building, the most modern in the world, was near the final phase of construction and numerous years of rebuilding of the faculty and student body showed a future bright with promise. But an effective and experienced leader was essential. I heard with great anticipation and relief from an eminent former dean, well known in academic and professional circles, that Rennard Strickland might well be “available.” This announcement was music to the ears of all who heard it. Rennard Strickland, already distinguished in numerous deanships elsewhere, was prepared to move from Oklahoma to Oregon and to be the next dean of the School of Law at this pivotal juncture in its existence.

Rennard has earned every high accolade with which he is greeted. He is an internationally respected legal scholar, one who fully merited the designation of one of the then newly created Knight Chairs at the University. His leadership skills as dean quickly gave the school a new burst of enthusiasm and his wise counsel made him a valued participant at the highest levels of university governance.

We salute Dean Strickland’s service with genuine gratitude. He has presided over the development of a new and technologically advanced legal education facility. He has provided thoughtful counsel and encouragement to his colleagues. He has engaged the lives and aspirations of hundreds of students. He has reached out both to traditional and to new constituencies of [*1140] the School of Law and for his legacy he has left it a much grander place. He is a leader in every sense of the word.

Much has been written about Rennard Strickland’s prolific authorship on issues of modern Indian policy and law. It is safe to call him one of the modern founders of this fascinating and deeply engaging body of scholarship. The range of his interests is wonderfully evident in the collection of essays he published in 1997 under the intriguing and appropriate title, *Tonto’s Revenge*.¹ From this writing one quickly senses the passion for fundamental truths, the probing thought of a keen intelligence, and the deep and fervent beliefs of one who understands and can articulate the values of an ancient culture. Truly in his own field of scholarship, which he has so powerfully helped to define, we see a preeminent figure of our generation. Students and colleagues sense this presence, which Dean Strickland carries with him utterly without pretension. It is part of his very being and therefore part of the authenticity that so pervades his leadership skills.

Rennard is a dean’s dean, a title that I bestow with the admiration of one who preceded him during my own brief two-and-one-half year tenure as a dean. His experience and innate good judgment have been evident from the beginning. He took seriously, for example, his responsibility to engage students. The user committee of the new School of Law was startled to learn that the incoming dean wanted the floor plans to be changed in the new building at the last minute. The dean’s suite was to be on the first floor, accessible to students, not on the second floor with the library and other offices. The students he first greeted learned as did those of each subsequent entering class that they would be personal guests at the dean’s home for a dinner hosted by him within the first few weeks of school.

Faculty equally responded to Rennard’s personal touch, wry humor and candid leadership. Patience is often required of a dean, and patience he has in abundance. Other university stakeholders quickly appreciated Rennard’s

value. His colorful wardrobe occasioned comments of awe at the first dean's retreat he attended shortly after his appointment. His necktie collection is both vast and varied. His probing, even pungent observations on the academic culture show the skills and insight of an anthropologist, as he has every right to call himself by dint of practical experience. He is renowned for offering the crisp comment, appropriate [*1141] story, or one-line characterization that allows the dialogue of a dean's counsel to reach closure on a controversial issue of the day. He is a true master of the fitting anecdote. His self-styled "sermonettes" show all the touches of his oratorical skills, polished in his days as a school-boy national champion. Those colloquies both engage and inform the audiences that are often spontaneously subjected to them.

Rennard has brought great distinction to the University of Oregon, and we are delighted that his decision to step down as dean is accompanied by a resolve to continue as a member of our faculty. He has been deeply and passionately involved in the issues of the day. He speaks to all questions with a voice of integrity, and he has unusual power because his personal example of dedication and intelligence has such persuasive force.

We thank you, Rennard, for bringing us five years of distinguished leadership and leaving the School of Law poised for even greater accomplishments in the future. Your legacy lives in the lives of all whom you continue to touch with your wisdom and insight.

FOOTNOTES:

n1. Rennard Strickland, *Tonto's Revenge* (1997).