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Sam Hanson

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A Tribute to Dean James F. Hogg

Samuel L. Hanson[†]

Dean James Hogg is completing a 10 year term as Dean and President of William Mitchell College of Law. Prior to his assumption of that position, I was only vaguely familiar with Dean Hogg when he was counsel to Control Data Corporation and was made available to act as counsel for Rural Ventures, Inc., a consortium of for-profit and not-for-profit corporations that were brought together to promote the economic viability of small farming operations through the application of appropriate technology. As a member of the Board of that organization, I early learned to respect Dean Hogg for his tough mindedness and his ability to steer 12 Board members with somewhat differing interests down a single legal path. Though it seemed complex at the time, it clearly did not compare in difficulty to the challenge of steering the interests of students, faculty, trustees, alumni and other interested community participants down the same path toward the enhancement of the quality of education provided at William Mitchell.

While he was Dean of William Mitchell, I observed Jim Hogg from several different perspectives — from my position as corporate member he reported to us annually on the state of the college as the corporation's chief executive officer; from my position as an alumnus and as president of my firm, he was a persistent and prodigious fund raiser; from my position as counsel to William Mitchell, he was the key representative of a client, and a model client at that, and from my position as a trial lawyer, he was an earnest and, from time-to-time, a challenging witness. From each of these perspectives I found Dean Hogg to be an honorable and decent human being, steadfast in his mission to secure the resources necessary to provide the highest quality of legal education, zealous in his enthusiasm for state-of-the-art technology and irrepressible in expressing his passion for the school and its many communities. It was a rare occasion to find any subject on which the Dean did not have a passionate

† Shareholder, Briggs and Morgan, P.A.

opinion, and rarer still to find him unable to express that opinion “crisply” (one of his favorite adjectives).

While these qualities served the College well, they also made life extremely interesting. Dean Hogg did not believe in avoidance techniques and was not one to shrink back from an opportunity to debate a point which he believed was important. This fact was perhaps most dramatically portrayed in his role as witness. Seldom in my career have I observed a witness who, being relieved of the obligation of addressing a question, pressed mightily on nevertheless with a “thank you very much.” Yet this did occur with some regularity in a deposition where, following my objection that the questioning was argumentative, repetitive or completely irrelevant, with instructions that the witness need not answer, Dean Hogg embraced the questions as though they had been his own.

These qualities of passion and irrepressibility have their origin, no doubt, in New Zealand, not in Minnesota. They are not likely to engender a neutral response from those with whom you work. So it was that Dean Hogg could claim both admirers and detractors from some of the same actions. It would not be accurate to say that he didn't take the detraction personally, because he placed a high personal value on collegiality and harmony in pursuit of excellence. It would be accurate to say that he did not allow the personal disappointment to deter him from his mission. He did not give in to the temptation to dilute his efforts in an attempt to please everyone.

Dean Hogg has served us well and his contributions will be valued for years to come.