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Tribute to The Honorable Myron H. Bright

John Attanasio†

On October 4, 1995, I, and every member of the faculty and staff at the School of Law, received a letter from Judge Myron Bright. The letter began simply enough: "Dear Colleagues and Friends at Saint Louis University School of Law"; and ended with an equally simple closing: "With high regards and affection, Myron H. Bright, Judge." In this letter, Judge Bright officially informed us that it was "time to say 'so long'" and that he would be teaching his last class one week later. Recalling some of the highlights of his long association with our School of Law, he chronicled his tenure here, beginning with his first appearance as "guest lecturer" in a Contracts class in the late 1970s (a "very happy and stimulating experience") and culminating with his final class in the fall of 1995. He spoke of being "proud and glad" to have "played a role as one of our Trial Ad professors," and stated that he had "had a ball" with his seminar students. Finally, he warned, "You haven't seen the last of me . . . . In the words of the old song of my generation, I'll be seeing you."

Anyone fortunate enough to have known this wonderful person for even a short period of time will recognize these written reflections as quintessential Judge Bright. His propensity for humor, understatement, and infectious enthusiasm for life profoundly affected the social and intellectual environment of Saint Louis University School of Law. Not unlike a powerful and sudden change in barometric pressure, Judge Bright's annual return visit as a Distinguished Professor of Law unfailingly produced an immediate and obvious surge of energy throughout the halls, classrooms, and offices of the Law School. Such is the legacy of one remarkable individual, friend, teacher, and judge.

During my time as Dean of Saint Louis University School of Law, I was privileged to become a good friend of Judge

† Dean, Southern Methodist University School of Law.
Bright. His steadfast dedication and demonstrated wisdom touched all of us. His many contributions to the School of Law extended far beyond his excellent teaching. Over the years, Judge Bright greatly enriched the curriculum and academic experience by generously serving as guest lecturer in a wide variety of classes, by serving as a judge for the moot court competition, and by bringing to the Law School a host of wonderful visitors including then-J ustice William Rehnquist, Irving Younger, Arthur Miller, and Floyd Abrams. Our physical plant also benefited from his giving spirit in the form of donated artwork, books, and improved courtroom facilities.

In his October 5th letter, Judge Bright stated that, in his experience, “the two best positions in law are federal circuit judge and professor of law.” As many of you already know, Judge Bright considered teaching to be his third career. In fact, it is arguable to anyone who witnessed him in action in a classroom or courtroom that teaching was his entire career, if not his central passion in life. Viewing himself as having played “a role” in our Trial Advocacy programs (while a typical “Brightism”), greatly diminishes his significant part in bringing to the Law School the prestigious Emil Gumpert Award for excellence in teaching trial advocacy. Similarly, his reference to having “a ball” with his students does not begin to tell the stories of the many students who argued creatively why they should get into his typically oversubscribed seminar, Appellate Practice: Jurisprudence, Strategy, and Decision-Making. Ask any of his former students to name the most memorable courses taken in law school and, inevitably, one of Judge Bright’s courses will be among them. Truly, Judge Bright understood the many dimensions of being a great teacher.

Judge Bright also instituted the Jurists-in-Residence program through which he brought renowned judges to visit Saint Louis University School of Law for several days. He believed that such a program would help students experience the human side of the judicial process through hearing and discussing the judge’s viewpoints on a variety of legal and non-legal issues. Such exposure would add a practical ingredient to the study of law, which he thought was so vital. His frequent participation in National Institute of Trial Advocacy (NITA) programs provided him an endless supply of innovative ideas for improving the trial advocacy course. His signature teaching style of part coach, part counselor, and part cheerleader proved inspirational to his students and in his active interaction with
other law professors. He was in every sense a Distinguished Professor of Law.

In closing, I want to express my personal gratitude to Judge Bright for extending his warmth, graciousness, and sage advice during my six years as Dean of the Law School at Saint Louis University. I can remember first meeting him at an Eighth Circuit Judicial Conference in Minneapolis. At a large reception, he personally introduced me to what seemed to be every judge at the conference. He could really work a crowd. Just after introducing me to one of his colleagues, he would whirl me around and introduce me to another. I can remember being dizzy by the end of the process!

Judge Bright's considerable talents and extraordinary personality remain the hallmarks of his very successful career. "With high regards and affection," I consider Judge Bright a dear colleague and friend.