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A Tribute to the Honorable Michael A. Wolff, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Missouri

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**A TRIBUTE TO THE HONORABLE MICHAEL A. WOLFF, CHIEF
JUSTICE OF THE SUPREME COURT OF MISSOURI**

SUSAN A. FITZGIBBON*

I am honored to add my thoughts on Judge Michael A. Wolff to this *Saint Louis University Law Journal* celebration of his elevation to Chief Judge of the Supreme Court of Missouri.

Judge Wolff was Professor Wolff when, as a first-year law student, I met him at Saint Louis University Law School. Although I did not have the good fortune to have him as a professor, I attended a number of his lectures and it was easy to see why students were crazy about him. He had the knack of making complicated legal concepts, with all of their attending uncertainties, completely accessible. He managed to accomplish this with an utter command of the law, a totally relaxed style of presentation, a definite flair for the dramatic, and an incomparable sense of humor. Professor Wolff's style somehow also communicated a confidence in each student's ability, which was particularly encouraging in a first-year course like civil procedure, and which certainly contributes to the number of current and former students who remain devoted to him.

In 1987, I joined the law faculty, and Mike became my colleague. With me and with many other new teachers over the years, Mike has been extremely generous with his time and his advice on teaching and writing. Over the years, his broad intellectual curiosity prompted his teaching of a wide variety of courses including civil procedure, trial advocacy, health law, administrative law, constitutional law and a seminar on criminal sentencing that involved students and judges grappling with criminal sentences. In the 1970s, as one of the first professors to recognize health care as a discrete field of legal study, he pioneered both the development of that area of law and one of the nation's preeminent health law programs here at Saint Louis University. There is no doubt that his wife Patricia's medical practice as a pediatrician helped to spark this insight and deepen his understanding of this area.

While Mike taught, he also practiced law as a litigator, albeit on a limited basis. Mike also was always a student of and involved in politics. Twice he ran for the position of Attorney General of Missouri before he joined the staff

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of Governor Carnahan as Chief Counsel and as Special Counsel. If you ever wanted to get the “low-down” on an issue in Missouri politics, Mike was the source to mine. Not only would he have the cold facts (a throw back to his early days as a reporter in Minnesota), but he also delivered them with a cogent analysis and at least one sustained belly laugh. It is no wonder that, even before he attained his current status as a judge or Chief Justice of the Missouri Supreme Court, people would be delighted and flock to see him at any gathering. Of course, the fact that he is incredibly well read, and sees the most interesting current movies, and is a raconteur on the level of Will Rogers, decidedly adds to his personal attraction.

We are so fortunate that this unique man is now a unique judge. On a technical level, in his legal opinions, he employs a crisp, elegant writing style that anyone may understand (again, a reflection of his experience as a reporter). On a jurisprudential level, he brings to the task of judging the broad and varied perspectives of an academic, a politician, and a litigator. But, as importantly, Mike brings a true sense of justice and humanity to each judicial decision. It is hard to imagine a more perfect person for the task of judging than a man who understands how politics shapes the law; a man who has studied the challenges of sentencing criminals; a man who more than thirty years ago recognized the need to study the impact of law on the basic human need for health care; a man who respects and appreciates lawyers and the role the legal profession plays in society; a man who is devoted to his family and friends; and a man who is considered to be a true friend by so many people. Missouri surely could not have a better judge or Chief Justice for its Supreme Court than Mike Wolff.