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Recommended Citation

Roger Williams University School of Law, "Newsroom: AP Cites Horwitz on Outgoing RI AG" (2010). *Life of the Law School (1993-)*. 116.

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Newsroom

AP Cites Horwitz on Outgoing RI AG

The Associated Press spoke with Associate Dean Andrew Horwitz for a special recap of outgoing Attorney General Patrick Lynch's eight years in office.

ASSOCIATED PRESS: "[In 8 years, RI AG dealt with club fire, lead paint](#)" by ERIC TUCKER. Picked up by [the Boston Globe](#).



PROVIDENCE, R.I. (AP), Dec.

22, 2010 - Patrick Lynch was a boyish-looking 37 when he became attorney general, a former Brown basketball star who parlayed positions as a gang prosecutor and lobbyist into becoming the state's top lawyer eight years ago. He leaves office with noticeable flecks of gray hair, as much as a reflection of his job as his age.

During his tenure, Lynch won a landmark lawsuit against former lead paint companies - but saw the verdict overturned and was held in contempt for intemperate comments during the case. He endured criticism from some for his handling of the investigation into a nightclub fire that killed 100 people, even getting into tiffs with the judge and a victim's father, and faced persistent questions over whether he was doing enough to combat corruption in a state notorious for it.

Lynch says he has no regrets and is proud of his record. Criticism and second-guessing, he says, come with the job.

"My skin is a lot thicker than it was when I came in," he said. "My chin has been hit a few times so it's a lot firmer. But I think I had a pretty firm chin when I came in here."

Horwitz, an associate dean at the Roger Williams University law school who praises Lynch for surrounding himself with top talent. "I think his job was really to draw that distinction for people."

Lynch says he was upfront with victims in every case.

"What I did was speak the truth to people," he said. "Sometimes that was difficult."

Other headline-making cases include the corruption indictment of former state Sen. John Celona; the trial of Esteban Caprio in the death of a police detective; and the prosecution of four Providence police officers in a drug sting. And after a woman was murdered by an abusive boyfriend, Lynch successfully sought a law requiring dating violence education in schools.

"There was a commitment to aggressively prosecuting violent crimes and emphasizing the public safety of that," said defense lawyer Edward Roy.

The state attorney general's office also represents the state in lawsuits and handles consumer protection and other issues. Lynch's best-remembered civil case is a public nuisance lawsuit, brought by a predecessor but pursued by Lynch after a 2002 mistrial, against former lead paint companies.

His office won a verdict that could have cost three manufacturers billions of dollars. But the state Supreme Court reversed the verdict, denying Lynch what would have been a precedent-setting victory.

That case had rocky moments for Lynch, who was fined \$15,000 - later reversed - for calling the companies' legal tactics "despicable" and for saying that the verdict showed they could not "duck and run" from their obligation to clean up the problem. A multi-million-dollar deal reached with DuPont before trial to fund the cleanup of hundreds of homes was scrutinized because Lynch accepted campaign contributions from people with ties to the company.

The Ethics Commission found no violations, and Lynch calls the criticism baseless.

"They were trying to beat me into the ground so no other attorney general would step up," Lynch said. "I was the mole - whack-a-mole."

This year, Lynch sought the Democratic nomination for governor but backed out in July while trailing his primary opponent in fundraising. Lynch has ample money in his campaign account and doesn't rule out another run, and his visibility - and relative youth of 45 - could make him a contender.

Lynch hasn't announced his plans, beyond assisting a youth peace summit this summer, but says he's ready for different opportunities.

"It's time to move onto something new."

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