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Dean Logan's Blog

Controversy at the Open Government Summit

Posted by David Logan on 08/22/2011 at 03:54 PM

With RWU Law students returning to Bristol for the start of the 2011-2012 academic year, the School of Law is once again echoing with energetic conversation and debate. But earlier this month, the debate got an unusually early start as the School of Law hosted the [13th Annual Open Government Summit](#).

On its face, the summit – attended by some 300+ state and municipal officials, law enforcers, lawyers and others – was a fascinating legal conversation on when government records should be public versus confidential, when meetings should be open versus closed, and the various conflicts of interest that can arise in making those important decisions. It's events like this that underscore RWU Law's critical role as an impartial forum for discussion and criticism of the state's laws and legal system.



It also offered an impressive index of RWU Law's ever-rising profile in legal conversations across the state and region. Prominent RWU Law alumni leading the discussions included keynote Peter Kilmartin '98, Attorney General of Rhode Island; Michael Field '97, Assistant Attorney General; Lisa Pinsonneault '98, Special Assistant Attorney General; and Jason Gramitt '96 of the Rhode Island Ethics Commission.



Attorney General Peter Kilmer '98, Michael Field '97, Lisa Pinsonneault '98, and Jason Gramitt '96

For a group of protesters who greeted attendees as they drove in, it was also an opportunity to practice some street-level American democracy. Twenty or so protesters held up signs and chanted, expressing opposition to the AG's support for Secure Communities, a federal program of the Department of Homeland Security that's aimed at identifying and deporting undocumented immigrants convicted of crimes.

After the AG had concluded his remarks and left the room, he was asked about the kerfuffle and simply commented, "It's their right."



Roger Williams University President Dr. Donald J. Farish addresses summit attendees



AG Kilmartin introduces Mike Field

And he's right. The University and the School of Law, of course, take no official or institutional position on Attorney General Kilmartin's political and legal decisions and policies. Quite the contrary; we're committed to not just tolerating but actually encouraging a lively and respectful culture of civil discourse – both on and off campus – in which many diverse points of view are espoused and debated in a vibrant and democratic marketplace of ideas.