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September 23, 2020

Law School News

Ruth Bader Ginsburg and RWU Law

Remembering the special links between the Notorious RBG and Rhode Island's only law school ...

September 23, 2020 | Michael M. Bowden



Just hours after the passing of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg was announced on Friday, September 18, Roger Williams University School of Law Dean Gregory W. Bowman wrote to the faculty and staff, aptly describing the news as “punch in the gut.”

“She was a magnificent human being who believed in the rule of law, in justice for all, in the importance of lawyers, and in the strength of our constitutional system,” Bowman added. “She will be sorely missed.”

A long and touching tribute appeared on the [front page of the New York Times](#), written by veteran Supreme Court reporter Linda Greenhouse – who holds an Honorary Doctorate of Law from RWU Law, where she delivered the [keynote address for the 2008 Commencement](#).

Greenhouse and Roger Williams were joined once again following RBG's death, during an interview on the Rachel Maddow Show on MSNBC when a photo from RBG's visit was [displayed beside Greenhouse](#).

Naturally, among alumni, faculty and staff, thoughts immediately turned to [Ginsburg's extraordinary visit to RWU Law](#) in January 2018.

One reason for the event's "extraordinary" nature was immediately picked up in a remembrance in the Boston Globe, with the winkingly colloquial headline, "[Remember when Ruth Bader Ginsburg skipped Trump's State of the Union to visit Rhode Island?](#)" That perceived snub loomed large even among national news outlets at the time.

But skip it she did – despite arriving in Bristol during a minor snowstorm that was still severe enough to keep many registered attendees and media away due to adverse driving conditions.

The centerpiece of the Ginsburg visit was a fascinating "fireside chat" with Bruce M. Selya, a senior judge on the 1st U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, and longtime friend of both RBG and the School of Law. It was Judge Selya's first event in Appellate Courtroom 283, which had only recently been dedicated in his name.

Ginsburg's visit to RWU Law is still memorialized by several mementos around the school, including [a signed event poster](#), and (an open secret among law students) [the chair in which she sat](#) during the conversation.

[Television news](#) captured some of the excitement of the day. But it is definitely worth watching [the entire conversation](#), which is [archived here](#).

The Globe interviewed Selya about his friend the day after her death, for a story that featured [a photo of the two of them together at Roger Williams Law](#).

In the hours following Ginsburg's passing, [Dean Bowman spoke to WPRI's Tim White](#) about her legacy, calling her "a lawyer's lawyer" and "one of the all-time greats" on the Supreme Court.

Professor Emily Sack also reflected – in interviews on both [CBS](#) and [ABC](#) – about working for the Women's Rights Project at the ACLU, which Ginsburg co-founded in 1972.

"The world certainly seems to have changed since Friday," Dean Bowman said. "For many people, the world feels emptier because of Justice Ginsburg's passing. She made such a difference in so many ways, and she is deeply missed. She was a paragon of brilliance, hard work, and dedication to improving the law and society through her focus on equality. Her work on behalf of women's rights truly changed our country and the world."

She certainly won't be forgotten at RWU Law.