Dean Logan's Blog: Another Supreme Opportunity: Justice Samuel Alito at RWU Law, v. 1

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Recommended Citation
Roger Williams University School of Law, "Dean Logan's Blog: Another Supreme Opportunity: Justice Samuel Alito at RWU Law, v. 1" (2012). Law School Blogs. 121.
https://docs.rwu.edu/law_pubs_blogs/121
In recent years the Roger Williams Law community has had a remarkable four members of the Supreme Court of the United States visit Rhode Island [links to Breyer, Scalia and Roberts blogs], most recently Associate Justice Samuel Alito. The visit was organized by Ron Cass, Dean Emeritus of BU Law School, and a close friend of the Justice, and Justice Alito and his wonderful wife Martha-Ann were good sports, participating in a long list of events that enabled students, faculty, alums, and leaders of the bench and bar, to have multiple opportunities to interact with a leading jurist. The visit racked up extensive media coverage, not just in Rhode Island, but around the country, and, if you count a tweet by the BBC, around the world.

I have a lot of stories from the hectic days, too many for a single blog, but I do want to share a few. It was an amazing 48 hours, begun with the black Chevy Suburbans, with blacked out windows, sweeping onto campus, with an entourage of U.S. Marshalls securing the area and serving as a constant (but discreet) presence the whole time. The Justice was amazingly patient, not just in the 6(!) on-campus events he attended, but in his willingness to patiently pose for many, many pictures. The casual banter between Dean Cass and Justice Alito made the events relaxed, and the Justice’s willingness to talk about specific recent decisions was rewarding (and, frankly, a bit surprising). The Q&A sessions allowed a broad swath of our community to quiz the Justice on hot topics like how a Constitution written 200+ years ago can guide us in tackling a world filled with rapidly-evolving technology, and how in the heck a 1942 case involving a wheat farmer in Ohio (Wickard v. Filburn) can be so important in the very different economy of 21st century America. And, finally, my personal favorite from the morning: when the Justice asked whether I was the tallest law dean in America, I answered “yes” and whipped out one of the cards that my wife had printed for the many height-related inquiries I receive (see below).

Click here for the press coverage of the visit, and see below for pictures from a breakfast with a few top 3Ls; the Constitutional Law class that the Justice taught; and an informal session with student leaders. (A later blog will cover the afternoon events.)