

4-1-1992

Pres. Conference: President William Greiner on His Winding Road to Buffalo and UB's Budget Crunch'

UB Law Forum

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.law.buffalo.edu/ub_law_forum

Recommended Citation

UB Law Forum (1992) "Pres. Conference: President William Greiner on His Winding Road to Buffalo and UB's Budget Crunch'," *UB Law Forum*: Vol. 6 : No. 2 , Article 37.

Available at: https://digitalcommons.law.buffalo.edu/ub_law_forum/vol6/iss2/37

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Alumni Publications at Digital Commons @ University at Buffalo School of Law. It has been accepted for inclusion in UB Law Forum by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ University at Buffalo School of Law. For more information, please contact lawscholar@buffalo.edu.

Pres. Conference

President William Greiner on his winding road to Buffalo and UB's budget-crunch

It was the UB Law School that first drew William R. Greiner to Western New York. The University at Buffalo's newly installed 13th president, Greiner joined the Law School faculty in 1967 — an appointment, he says, that almost didn't happen when Dean William Hawkland temporarily forgot he had invited Greiner to sign on.

The president talked about his beginning years in education and the state of the university today in a wide-ranging interview with *UB Law Forum*.

Near the end of his undergraduate career at Wesleyan University, Greiner was conflicted over whether to enter a management program or law school. "The University of Chicago, Harvard or Yale — those were the places I was thinking about," he says.

"But the application for Harvard Business School ran to 20 pages! I found it so tedious, so silly, that it quashed any thought that I would go to Harvard Business School.

"Then I got the applications for Harvard Law School and Yale Law School. They were both about two pages and very direct and sensible. That was a primary reason why I dropped the idea of attending business school."

Greiner also gives credit to an economics professor at Wesleyan, Jerry Meyer, who helped him discover his leaning towards law. "He said something that was very perceptive," Greiner recalls.

"He said, 'Bill, you're just a bit

of a dilettante.' He didn't mean it in a pejorative way. He said: 'You just have an awfully broad range of interests and you're interested in working with people, influencing and helping them. If I were you, I'd go to law school, because it better suits your personality.'"

Greiner decided to take Meyer's advice. He won a full scholarship to Yale Law School, and in the next four years completed a dual-degree program in law and economics.

The next big decision was whether to practice law. A brief encounter with the corporate culture at Aetna Life Insurance Co. helped him answer that question. While living in central Connecticut one summer, he clerked for the giant company. The heat was stifling, and the company wasn't air-conditioned.

"I had unbuttoned my collar," Greiner remembers. "And I ran my tie down and rolled up my sleeves. Apparently, that was a mistake. Near the end of the day, I was quietly told that that just wasn't done. So I thought to myself, 'Well, I guess I'm not going to take a job offer from Aetna.' I didn't want to work in that kind of uptight environment. ... Funny how you make these choices."

Soon after, Greiner landed a teaching appointment at the University of Washington Management School, and he and his wife, Carol, headed west for the first time.

Teaching was a revelation for the young professor. "I just loved what I was doing," he says. "I started

teaching undergraduates and graduate students. I supervised Ph.D. candidates. I supervised master's candidates. They let me teach hundreds of undergraduates in the College of Arts and Sciences, great big classes."

After five years, he realized that graduate degrees in law and economics weren't enough. He would have to earn a doctoral degree to advance in his academic career. So he decided to return to Yale Law School.

"I had a great year," he remembers of that experience. "All of the faculty treated me as a colleague. They even let me do some teaching.

"In the year I was there it became clear to me that I really was a lawyer, that that was what interested me."

In the middle of fall semester, Professor Jacob D. Hyman came to New Haven on a faculty recruiting trip. But Greiner was obligated to spend another year at the University of Washington, and didn't pay much attention.

A short time later, though, Greiner attended a meeting of the American Association of Law Schools, in Washington, D.C., and met up with Hyman again. Once again, the UB professor invited him to an interview.

"At 5 in the afternoon I walked into a hotel suite," Greiner recounts, "and I'm not just in with the dean and a couple of other people — the whole faculty was in there! At the time, the faculty was only 15 people, and they all went to Washington to recruit. So I



had a seminar with all these interesting guys."

That led to a late-night drink with Dean William Hawkland — and a job offer.

"I went back to UW and I didn't hear anything for three weeks," Greiner says. "I finally called and said, 'Dean Hawkland, I thought I was going to come to Buffalo.'

"'Oh, God,' he said. 'I forgot.'

"What the heck. Things like that can happen."

Greiner finally did make the trip to Western New York. "I liked the people," he says. "I thought they were good people. So I went back and said, 'Carol, I think we ought to go to Buffalo.' And she said OK, and sight unseen, she came here.

"We just fell in love with the place. We've been here 25 years and never regretted it."

Greiner taught and held several administrative positions in the Law School before being named UB's associate vice president for academic affairs in 1980. He served for seven years as the university's provost before his appointment as president, succeeding Steven B. Sample, late last year.

To say that it's not easy to lead a large public university is probably the understatement of the decade, especially in these budget-crunch days. Greiner, whose son Terry is a UB Law alumnus and whose other son, Kevin, is currently a law student, has given careful thought

to a number of issues affecting the School and the University — and he doesn't hesitate to express strong opinions.

On the issue of how the Law School can attract and keep top-flight faculty, Greiner sees the challenge as one for the alumni.

"The Law School and its alumni have got to face the fact that fundraising just has to be a priority," he says. "There will be state money there to support basic things, but if you want to make a difference, it's going to have to be in terms of external sup-

port."

Further, he says, state lawmakers in Albany ought to be hearing more from all sides about the state's diminishing level of funding for the university.

"I think the alumni, the students and the faculty have to get hot on the issue of how we support higher education in New York," Greiner says. "You can't expect me to do it alone, and you can't expect SUNY Chancellor Bruce Johnstone to do it alone.

"The compact that was made when the university was merged into

the state system is being violated. UB was a university, not a college, when it came into the system. UB has never been just a college. I think what we're being driven towards is being just another big college, and I think that breaches the compact between the state and the people of Western New York.

"And we ought to be mad as hell about it. I think the alumni have to get political, and fast."

Greiner is glad to share his enthusiasm

for this new chapter in his life.

"Every day I come to the office, I get an education," says the white-haired professor, a man who reads three newspapers a day and history books for relaxation.

"People ask, 'Why have you stayed so long in administration?' I say, because I learn something new every single day about my institution, about the people in it, about how to do the job.

"I've never stopped learning." ■

"I think the alumni, the students and the faculty have to get hot on the issue of how we support higher education in New York," Greiner says. "You can't expect me to do it alone, and you can't expect SUNY Chancellor Bruce Johnstone to do it alone."