Hochul '84 Confirmed as U.S. Attorney for Western New York; Gary Dewaal '80 Among Top Counsels

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Hochul ’84 confirmed as U.S. Attorney for Western New York

It has been a long ride since then, but Bill Hochul ’84 – recently confirmed by the U.S. Senate as U.S. Attorney, the lead federal prosecutor in Western New York – vividly remembers that first terrifying, exhilarating year at UB Law School.

“Especially I remember my contracts class with Fred Konefsky,” Hochul said during an interview in his downtown Delaware Avenue office. “I learned a great deal about being a lawyer through his Socratic method. He called on me early and often. It was a class that taught me to think on my feet. You never knew where Professor Konefsky would take the discussion. It was like watching John Houseman teach at Harvard, on TV.”

Those skills, refined over years at the U.S. Attorney’s office, where he has served since 1991, came to the attention of Sen. Charles E. Schumer, who nominated Hochul to the top post. “Mr. Hochul has had a long and distinguished career in public service,” Schumer said. “His exceptional, innovative legal mind, his commitment to justice, and his extensive experience will make him an outstanding U.S. Attorney for the Western District.” President Obama made the appointment, Senate confirmation followed, and Hochul was sworn in April 10.

Hochul has served as chief of the office’s anti-terrorism unit, as anti-terrorism advisory council coordinator, as chief of the national security division and as confidential human source coordinator. He is known as a hard nosed trial attorney who routinely was assigned some of the biggest federal prosecutions in Western New York, including:

• Lead prosecutor of the “Lackawanna Six,” a group of young Muslim men from Lackawanna who trained at a camp in Afghanistan run by the al-Qaeda terrorist network.

• Prosecuting leaders of Laborers Local 91 in Niagara Falls, following a federal probe into labor racketeering “goon tactics” including beatings, death threats and a bombing.

• A sting operation that led to convictions of a restaurant owner and others who smuggled dozens of illegal Chinese aliens into the United States through Buffalo.

• The training of UB Law School was very good,” he says. “Law school teaches you how to take a position and defend it, and also how to even define your position.” In addition to Konefsky, he cites as an early influence Professor James Atleson: “Jim Atleson’s labor law class did a great job of bringing the law to life. It taught me that law is a living, breathing entity with real stories behind every case.” He’s also appreciative of former Dean Tom Headrick and the career counseling of Alan Carrel. And his moot court experience was especially formative, Hochul says. “The moot court program was outstanding. The opportunity to argue, with a partner, before lawyers and judges was great training. And the opportunity to travel – that, more than anything, developed my skills as a litigator.”

In his new position, he’ll be doing less direct litigation, a fact he acknowledges with a certain ruefulness. “For 26 years I’ve spent most of my working days in a courtroom or at least thinking about cases,” Hochul says. “I’m not in the courtroom anymore, and that is a significant difference. It’s more about oversight of the work our line attorneys and supervisors do.”

In addition to that oversight, he says he plans to do a lot of community outreach, “trying to encourage the community to report issues or areas of concern they may have – to raise our visibility so people bring us issues.” The U.S. Attorney’s office comprises units dealing with organized crime, terrorism, white-collar crime and gang violence. Hochul is responsible for an office that employs about 120, two-thirds of them in Buffalo. There is also a Rochester office.

He is married to Erie County Clerk Kathleen C. Hochul, who held the Bible at his swearing-in ceremony. They have a son and a daughter – both, he said, bound for law school in the next few years.

Gary DeWaal ’80 among top general counsels

Gary A. DeWaal, group general counsel for Newedge USA, a global brokerage firm headquartered in New York City, was one of five finalists for the International Law Office General Counsel of the Year Award. DeWaal, a 1980 graduate of the Law School in the J.D./MBA program, was selected from among more than 3,000 corporate counsel and law firm nominees for the honor. The International Law Office designation recognizes lawyers “for demonstrable achievements across the full spectrum of in-house responsibility.” The awards were presented at a black-tie dinner in New York City on June 23.

DeWaal is a member of UB Law School’s Dean’s Advisory Council. He joined Fimat in 1995, and the company merged with Calyon Financial in 2007 to form Newedge USA.