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In Remembrance of Dean Robert Yegge

IN REMEMBRANCE OF DEAN ROBERT YEGGE

THE HONORABLE PATRICIO M. SERNA[†]

I am truly honored to write a tribute to the late Dean Robert Yegge, who passed away peacefully on December 16, 2006. My tribute to the Dean will focus on his accomplishments in securing diversity and inclusion at the Sturm College of Law and in pioneering a multi-disciplinary approach to legal education, thereby enhancing the legal profession throughout this great nation. I contributed a short essay in honor of the 75th anniversary of the *Denver University Law Review* in 1998 wherein I stated:

Thank you, Dean Yegge, for giving us the opportunity to be major contributors to society and to pursue our dreams. Thank you also for being a visionary that brought the law school to national prominence by recognizing the importance of educating lawyers in disciplines other than law in order to enhance their ability to analyze fully both legal doctrine and issues of public policy. Under your leadership, the law school became not only a teaching institution, but also a research organization and a center of community action and service programs. You pioneered the multi-faceted approach to legal education that today is prevalent in our nation's law schools.

I stated the following at the Memorial Service for Dean Yegge on January 13, 2007:

There is a Native American saying: "We will always be remembered forever by the tracks we leave." Dean Yegge left deep and distinctive tracks of enormous integrity, enlightened wisdom, the courage of a lion, a nurturing and caring heart, unselfish generosity and consideration of others, illuminating vision, and moving inspiration. The Dean not only recognized and appreciated the value of diversity and inclusion – he did something about it – because as he once said, "It was the right thing to do; it needed to be done."

In the early 1960s, there was a profound dearth of Hispanic lawyers in the southwest. The Dean obtained a Ford Foundation grant in

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1967 for an intensive summer law program for Hispanics. I was a member of the first class of twenty individuals. Eleven of us were awarded full tuition and a fellowship to this great law school. All eleven of us were successful in the study of law, and we all passed the bar exams in our respective states.

The first summer preparatory program was such a resounding success that shortly thereafter the Council on Legal Education Opportunity (CLEO) was founded as a non-profit project of the ABA Fund for Justice and Education to expand opportunities for minority and low-income students to attend law school. Over the past thirty-five years, more than 7500 students have participated in CLEO's pre-law and law school academic support programs, successfully matriculated through law school, passed the bar exam, and joined the legal profession. Can you imagine? Our very own visionary Dean Yegge started the ball rolling at this law school in this extremely successful, productive, and noble endeavor that has greatly enhanced diversity and inclusion in our nation's law schools and in the legal profession.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., said, "Life's most persistent and urgent question is: what are you doing for others?" Dean Yegge immediately comes to mind. He made a monumental difference, and this difference serves as a major cornerstone of his wonderful life legacy.

I have personally benefitted from his legacy, as well as from our friendship which spanned forty years. I'm so proud that the Dean came to Santa Fe in 1996 and spoke at my swearing in to the New Mexico Supreme Court. He also attended my swearing in as Chief Justice in 2001.

It has been said that "some people come into our lives and quietly go. Some people move our soul to dance. They awaken us to new understanding with the passing whisper of their wisdom. Some people make the sky more beautiful to gaze upon. They stay in our lives for awhile, leave footprints in our hearts, and we are never, ever the same." This was Dean Yegge. The essence and content of his character are personified by the distinctive tracks he left us to forever remember him.

Those of us who were touched by Dean Robert Yegge will never forget him. His innovative and caring spirit will continue to inspire future students at this great law school.