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Ribbon-Cutting Ceremony

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Ribbon-Cutting Ceremony

RIBBON-CUTTING CEREMONY REMARKS: DEAN GROSSMAN

CLAUDIO M. GROSSMAN*

Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg; Mayor Muriel Bowser; President Kerwin; Jack Cassell, President of the Board of Trustees; Provost Bass; other distinguished speakers and guests, including members of the diplomatic community, colleagues, friends, students, and alumni here today from around the world: I would like to welcome all of you to this magnificent law school campus, one that will enable us to reach a future that we can hardly imagine today.

Our state-of-the-art campus represents the highest standards in legal education facilities. I am sure that you will appreciate the abundant light, which permeates our campus and is the conscious result of creative architectural design. This light is both a metaphor and a catalyst for learning, for the encouragement of ideas, and the use of transparency and openness in the pursuit of knowledge and justice. Let us never forget that [the purpose of] this campus is to house a community . . . a remarkable community—a community [that] is very meaningful to all of us and to me.

I came to our school in 1982 from the Netherlands as a Fulbright visitor. I was a political refugee from my native country, Chile, at that time living under a military dictatorship. Thirty-four years ago, this community embraced me and gave me tremendous opportunities to contribute, first as director of its international programs and then its Dean for the last twenty-one years.

* Dean, *American University Washington College of Law* (1995–present); Professor of Law, *American University Washington College of Law* (1985–present). President, Inter-American Institute for Human Rights; former member (2003–2015) and Chairperson (2008–2015), United Nations Committee against Torture; and former member (1993–2001) and President (1996–97; 2001), Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

It means a lot to me that this celebration is taking place in this Hall, donated in my name, even if I am a little bit embarrassed by the size of the letters that you see when you come in. Many thanks for your generous gift [to name this Hall]. It means a lot to me that Judge Buergenthal, a former dean of this school and the one “guilty” of hiring me, is here today, as well as the Chilean Aambassadors[, Juan Gabriel] Valdés and [Juan Pablo] Lira, the only names I will pronounce without an accent probably today, [who] represent[] a [now-]democratic country.

It means a lot to me, personally, to see all of you here: my colleagues, our students, our graduates, my friends, and my family. Thank you. And look what we have built together! Generations to come will appreciate the sacrifice and vision that went into this campus.

The journey to this building began eight years ago and has been possible thanks to many. First, our alumni, whose contributions to the profession and their affection for and generosity to our institution inspire all of us. They have been a constant source of guidance and counsel, for which we remain deeply grateful.

I cannot mention all of you who have made this campus possible, but let me mention that Bob and Suzy Pence brought today a check for one hundred thousand dollars as their initial contribution for creating a special scholarship fund for first responders. Thank you.

I also want to remind all of you that at 5:30 p.m., we will be holding the ribbon-cutting ceremony for our spectacular Stephen S. Weinstein Courtroom. You are all invited. And many thanks to you, Skippy. Thank you.

The journey has also been possible thanks to our faculty—my esteemed colleagues—who even in challenging times for legal education showed tremendous commitment and leadership . . . , understood the importance of moving ahead, [and] set no limits on ambitions. Thanks to our administrators and staff, who represent the highest level of professionalism and service and whose signature is all around this building.

Thanks to our students, who are sitting here and elsewhere in the building. There are 2000 persons [here today viewing] . . . this ribbon-cutting ceremony. Our students enthusiastically embraced the new campus project and are the source of valuable ideas, such as the growth of our renowned journals, the realization of conferences addressing key issues of our time, the creation of numerous non-governmental organizations, and the expansion of our pro bono

work. Our students have shown us that education is a two-way street, teaching us while we also . . . teach them.

Let me make an important announcement today on this campus of opportunity: we are committing an additional four million dollars for the purposes of increasing merit scholarships and financial aid. That's the way to secure opportunity.

We are also here thanks to the University's leadership. President Neil Kerwin has provided unwavering guidance and support throughout the process, making clear that the law school is a vibrant and integral part of the University.

Our gratitude also goes to the Board of Trustees . . . ; the President of the Board of Trustees, Jack Cassell; and Provost Scott Bass, who accompanied us throughout this journey.

I also want to mention the late Don Myers, former Vice President and Treasurer, who sadly passed away in 2014. How pleased would Don be to be here today. We started imagining this campus in 2008 in a restaurant close to this place. Without Don, this project would not have been possible.

On this day allow me also to mention our founding mothers. Our school's journey began in [1896] when Ellen Spencer Mussey and Emma Gillet created the "Woman's Law Class," with an enrollment of only three students: Delia Sheldon Jackson, Nanette Paul, and Helen Malcolm.

When local schools refused to admit these three students, women, our founding mothers incorporated the Washington College of Law, starting a very powerful tradition of opportunity, creativity, perseverance, and commitment.

They did not stand idle in the face of gender discrimination. They decided to take action. As Ellen Spencer Mussey herself said: "The world belongs to those who go forth and work for it."

How proud they would be to see this new campus—to see that fifty-eight percent of our students are women. To see three women justices on the U.S. Supreme Court, including Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, who is our keynote speaker today—and we are going to hear from her. How proud our founding mothers would be to also see the Mayor of Washington, D.C., Muriel Bowser, an alum[na] of American University.

It is my sincere hope that this new home for the school, with its superb library and classrooms . . . , its light, its easily accessible location, and its welcoming and open common places, will further strengthen our wonderful community and help us continue working on behalf of our core values: excellent legal education, the promotion of opportunities, and access to justice for all.
