

# PRESENTATION OF DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD TO PROFESSOR DOUGLAS BAIRD

March 23, 2023

I'm sorry that I have only 5 minutes to introduce and tell you about Professor Douglas Baird, this year's recipient of the College's Distinguished Service Award. A proper introduction, and one befitting Douglas' accomplishments and contributions, would take much longer. So this will be just a "highlights reel," but I'm sure you'll get the gist of what a remarkable person Douglas is.

The College confers the Distinguished Service Award each year on a College Fellow who has provided distinguished service consistently rendered over a considerable period from voluntary activities in a manner that are consistent with the College's goals and purposes. Let me make the case for why Douglas so clearly deserves this award.

After graduating summa cum laude from Yale College, he attended Stanford Law School, where he was elected to the Order of the Coif. Insights from two of his Stanford connections show how extraordinary he was even then and what lay ahead:

One of his classmates had this to say about him:

It was obvious that Doug [for he was then only called Doug] was smarter than everyone within the building (including the professor). It was even more intimidating to talk substance with him outside of class, because it was hard to come up with an immediate response other than, "Huh? How did you think of *that*?" Doug was probably the major cause of "imposter syndrome" among members of the Stanford Class of 1979.

One of his professors characterized his work as the Managing Editor of the Stanford Law Review as "precise and gifted," leading that professor to write what became, at least for a long while, the leading explanation of American

bankruptcy law. Note that the articles were always referred to with the professor's name last, despite his seniority: Baird & Jackson.

Those articles led to the great Baird-Warren debates over the purpose of our corporate bankruptcy laws, which continue to shape nearly all corporate bankruptcy policy debates today.

After clerking on the Ninth Circuit, Douglas secured a teaching position at University of Chicago Law School, where he was promoted to full professor in only four years. He served as Dean of the Law School for five years, where, among other things, he hired a young Lecturer in Law who later gained some wide recognition. Maybe you've heard of Barack Obama.

By last count, Douglas has authored or co-authored 30 scholarly books, served as the editor for two others, contributed to over a dozen book sections, and authored nearly 90 law review articles. He will be discussing his most recent book tomorrow morning at the educational session.

His scholarship is held in high regard by the academy, the bar, and the bench, having been cited over 3,500 times in articles and 150 times in cases.

And yet, he deeply understands the actual practice. He has devoted substantial time and effort in learning how top bankruptcy practitioners think and how they manage to push the boundaries of the law in ways that most academics simply cannot comprehend. I think this understanding is most notably represented in his most recent book, as some of you might hear tomorrow morning.

Those accomplishments would be enough to elevate anyone to the highest ranks of the profession and secure recognition and fame. But this award is about service, and in that Douglas excels equally.

One of the College's important initiatives is mentoring. Douglas has been an extraordinary mentor even before that became something professionals valued and pursued. The list of people who count him as their primary

mentor includes dozens of law professors, several judges, former deans at major law schools, and countless law firm partners. His commitment to his mentees has led to his being named godfather to the children of two of them and to being invited to and attending former students' graduation parties and weddings.

He is loved and respected as a teacher. One of his colleagues told me that when Douglas teaches the bankruptcy class at the law school at the same time as his colleague, his colleague's enrollment drops from 80 students to 20.

Every year the law students hold an auction to provide funding for public interest internships. Douglas has been the auctioneer for this event for many years, and he usually offers a whisky tasting or dinner as an item students can bid on. Most years it goes for the highest amount of all items (as high as \$1,500). At least one year, when one group mentioned to Douglas that they'd lost the bidding, he responded by inviting them all to dinner anyway. His view has always been that he should be available to mentor students whenever possible.

He rarely turns down a request from a professor or lawyer to pick his brain about a topic. But only at their risk, as he is so intellectually demanding. I've heard from two colleagues that having a dinner with Douglas is a stressful evening, as he spins hypotheticals and challenges your thinking, making you think harder and deeper, without ever letting on what he thinks, and by doing so is always trying to make you better, which he usually does.

But wait, there's more! For 20 years, he served on the Board of the South East Chicago Commission, a community-based not-for-profit organization focused on enhancing economic development in five neighborhoods on the south side of Chicago. He has served on the Board of the Renaissance Society, a University of Chicago art museum featuring *avant garde* and cutting edge artists from around the world.

He has served on the Board of Directors of the College, on the Executive Committee and as Vice Chair and Chair of the National Bankruptcy Conference, on the board of Directors of the American Law & Economics Association.

He serves so much, that he has even served at a fine French restaurant in Chicago. Actually, he moonlighted as a chef there for a number of years and is an extraordinary cook.

And then there's Douglas the person. On this stage a few years ago, Judge Thomas Ambro, himself a recipient of this award, described that year's recipient as unlike some, having an ego that could accommodate a much greater talent. Like that year's recipient, just so with Douglas. He has the easy manner, the pleasant demeanor, and the humility appropriate to a person with far lesser talents.

So you can see why, even today, he continues to contribute (even unintentionally) to many colleagues' impostor syndromes!

If I am permitted a personal note, my own experience with Douglas over the past 35 years is the same, from the time he engaged with my then four-year old son about Teen-Age Mutant Ninja Turtles at Logan Airport on our way to a conference, to his mentoring of that same son when he studied at University of Chicago, to my work with him in the National Bankruptcy Conference on some of the most perplexing bankruptcy policy issues, to the time he hosted me and Kathleen at his apartment, showing his extraordinary chef talents and graciousness. It's been an honor, a privilege, and a delight to know Douglas and to work with him, and for that I am grateful.

It is hard to conceive of a person more deserving of the Distinguished Service Award. Before giving Douglas a chance for rebuttal, please join me in congratulating Professor Douglas Baird as we present him this award.