

Jay Furman Memorial

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Remarks of Richard L. Revesz

Jay Furman died almost three months ago. He had an uncanny ability to light a spark in those who knew him well. I really miss Jay and I really miss having that spark within me. Over the 13 years during which I knew him well, first as a trustee and extraordinary supporter of the Law School and then as a good friend, Jay brightened every interaction with his irrepressible enthusiasm for life and for ideas, and with his distinctive brand of out-of-the-box thinking.

Jay was the most wide ranging intellectually curious person I've ever known. He was also one of the most caring, loyal friends I've ever had. I so miss the hundreds of lunches we had together, the hard-to-interpret e-mails, sharing Jewish holidays, the Buenos Aires and many La Pietra conferences, the countless meetings at which Jay could always be counted on to provide an element of surprise and to turn the conversation in an unexpected direction.

Luckily, Jay did not have the filters that keep people from freely revealing their thoughts, and as a result we were treated to the uncensored version of Jay's intellect. One of my first substantive conversations with Jay came a few weeks after my appointment as Dean had been announced, but before I had officially started the job. Jay

called to say that he had been thinking about an issue and that he wanted to share an idea with me. He had just decided that tenure for academics made no sense and wondered what I planned to do about it. It was a fun conversation, though I eventually told him that I was looking forward to my new job and that I didn't really want it to end before it even got started. So, I wouldn't be tackling this matter right away. It turns out that I never did.

Jay kept sharing creative thoughts at a very impressive clip. He called once to tell me that he had figured how to predict the future relationship between the euro and the dollar and wanted to test his idea with faculty members who were experts in the area. Our ongoing conversations always had so many strands that I never got back to asking him what his idea was or how our colleagues at the Law

School had reacted to it. But as I reflect on the conversation, I do wonder whether there is a connection between Jay's passing and the significant fall of the euro over the last few months.

Jay retained this curiosity and passion for big ideas even during his illness. The last time I saw Jay was on December 16, less than three weeks before he died. He wasn't feeling well that day and hadn't gone to his office. So, we met at his apartment and went to a nearby restaurant. Even as we talked about his illness, his spirit was quite upbeat. But he did express serious regret about one matter: he had an idea for how to bring about peace in the Middle East, which he wanted to share with our colleague Moshe Halbertal. But he had not felt well enough to have lunch with Moshe a few days earlier. Like

the euro, peace in the Middle East has not done very well since Jay's passing.

While Jay always seemed more interested to talk about ideas than about his business, I am convinced that there was a strong relationship between his irrepressible intellect and his business success. Every once in a while I caught a glimpse of how Jay thought about business matters. We had lunch once right before he taught a real estate class here at the Law School. He thought that it was very important for our students to understand his idiosyncratic perspective about the relationship between up-REITs and down-REITs. By the end of lunch, Jay had convinced me that this issue was probably quite important. But I had the sinking feeling that our students, however talented, would not understand it, at least not after just one class.

Along these lines, Jay once called to ask me for advice. He needed to hire a lawyer. He wanted to hire one who had experience in transactions that had never been done before. We talked for a while about what “experience” might mean in this context.

It is hard to imagine that any institution could ever have a better friend than Jay was to NYU Law School. The physical manifestations of his support are everywhere: Furman Hall, the Furman Center, the Furman Academic Scholarship Program, and more recently, under Trevor’s deanship, the Furman Public Service Program. I remember the dinner to celebrate the opening of Furman Hall in 2004. It was a wonderful event, which included speeches by Elena Kagan, then the dean of Harvard Law School, and

Lord Slynn of Hadley, a Law Lord. We had been trying for quite a while to figure out what would be a suitable, light-hearted but not serious, gift for Jay. We got a good break when we learned that somewhere in South Carolina there was an institution called Furman University. We decided that a good way to express how Jay had transformed NYU Law School was to get him all the Furman University paraphernalia: sweatshirt, t-shirt, mug. I told him in my dedication speech that separate namings were inefficient. Surely, he would appreciate the economies of scale symbolized in our gifts. Jay seemed to enjoy the message, though I don't know whether he ever wore the clothes or used the mug.

But focusing on the physical manifestations of Jay's extraordinary institutional support would miss a great deal

of the picture. However unprecedented his financial support was, at least as much sweat equity was involved. Whether it was coming up with bidding strategies for telecom equipment or discussing the signaling function of wall-to-wall carpeting patterns, Jay was indefatigable. He argued vigorously but never wanted his position to prevail merely because he was a trustee and leading supporter: he wanted to have his way only if his argument was the stronger one. He said that all the time, and very often he prevailed on the standard that he had set. You can see Jay's fingerprints in countless decisions, big and small, and not just ones involving the programs that he supported. For example, if you like the way in which the pattern of the carpet changes as you turn from the fourth-floor hallway to go to Trevor's office, you should thank Jay.

The Furman Academic Scholars were great beneficiaries of Jay's personal involvement. He would frequently have lunch with individual students to talk about their ideas. And, at these lunches, Jay would seek advice from them on his own ideas. He took enormous delight in their accomplishment and always wanted to make sure that the Law School was doing enough to promote their career aspirations. Jay had the students over for group dinners at his New York apartment and for retreats at his house in Water Mill.

Jay's love for ideas and for institutions was coupled with an even deeper love for his family. It came across in practically every one of our conversations.. I have never seen anyone so happy as Jay was during an afternoon in the summer of 2013. He had just had surgery to remove part of

his lung and my wife Vicki and I were visiting him in his room at the Cornell hospital. It was an unusual place for a display of unbounded happiness. But the next day, Jay told us, Jesse would be swearing Jason in as Chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers. All the grandchildren would be there. A United States District Judge and a member of the President's cabinet, both his sons, both in their early 40s; there was good reason to be happy and proud! Jay quickly added: "And they are both such nice people."

I miss Jay a great deal. There are so many things I would have loved to tell him over these three months. Nick Bagley, in the first class of Furman Scholars, got tenure at the University of Michigan Law School, becoming the first Furman Scholar to get tenure at a top law school.

Genevieve Lakier, a Furman Scholar on the teaching market this year, got an entry-level offer at the University of Chicago. Jay would have taken such delight in these news. Vicki and I went to a benefit function for a supportive housing provider last week, which included an exhibit of wonderful sculptures from Zimbabwe. I have the sense that Jay would have really liked them and it would have been so great to go there with him.

And there were so many things I wanted to learn from him. At our last lunch, I didn't get to ask him about his idea for peace in the Middle East because the conversation veered to our respective families, and an hour and a half later Jay was tired and I accompanied him back to his apartment. I had the sense that he would not be leaving his apartment much anymore and I looked forward to visiting

him frequently in the months ahead and finding out the answer to that question and to many others. Very sadly, Jay died shortly thereafter and these conversations could now never take place. Before I left his apartment that afternoon, though, I did get to tell him that I loved him, which I had not done previously.

Over the last year, I lost three people who were hugely significant to my life: my mother, who died last May; Judge Feinberg, for whom I clerked, who died last July, and Jay Furman, who died last January. I remember each of them in my prayers ever night.

Thank you Jay, for your extraordinary friendship and generosity and for having made the world a better and far more interesting place. I will always miss you!