From the Dean

Happy Birthday, Washington University

On September 14, 2003, the School of Law joined in a celebration of the 150th anniversary of the founding of Washington University. Some 800 parents and children attended *The Three Bears v. Goldilocks* in two separate presentations at the law school. Both children’s juries held for the Three Bears; the second jury, taking their responsibilities enormously seriously, awarded the ursine plaintiffs $1.2 million for pain and suffering. Some 400 attendees also saw a re-creation of the Dred Scott trial. Throughout the hallways and the W.L. Hadley Griffin Student Commons, a pictorial display of the history of the law school vividly illustrated how far this School has progressed since its founding in 1867.

The progress of the University as a whole is particularly striking. In the life of a great university, 150 years is not a long time. But it has been sufficient for a school organized in the parlor of a St. Louis merchant, Wayman Crow, to become an international leader in university education. The recent past has witnessed striking progress in our undergraduate program, which is now among the very best in the country.

Birthdays are an appropriate time for reflection. Few contributions of American democracy have been more striking than our national commitment to higher education. In 1900 fewer than 5 percent of our population attended any college or university; by 2000 an extraordinary 65 percent of recent high school graduates were enrolled in an institution of higher education. Our colleges and universities have provided the intellectual basis for an American economy and culture as broadly based as any in the world.

Much of our nation’s recent progress in law, the social sciences, medicine, and the biological sciences is a consequence of an informed and well-educated populace.

The 21st century will witness fundamental challenges to our educational system. Tuition and living expenses at many private institutions now equal or exceed $40,000 per year. Public universities are facing the stress of diminishing state support, which makes being fully competitive with private institutions in many states remarkably difficult. Much of the extraordinary growth of many outstanding institutions in higher education can be traced to a significant expansion in federal loan, grant, and contract programs. In the near term the reality of extraordinary federal deficits will subject many of these programs to what may prove to be painful re-examinations.

The steady progress of Washington University in part is a tribute to the excellence of its leadership, to the caution of its Board of Trustees in administration of endowment funds, and to patient, thoughtful planning. Washington University has succeeded because a succession of chancellors has worked hard to confront the challenges of each period and because of the devotion of its alumni.

As dean, I extend the best wishes of all of us in the School of Law community to the University itself during its yearlong sesquicentennial celebration. Happy birthday, Washington University. May your progress have just begun. ◆