

# Pace Environmental Law Review

---

Volume 16  
Issue 2 *Summer 1999*

Article 8

---

June 1999

## A Tribute to Dean Richard L. Ottinger

Alicia Menechino

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.pace.edu/pelr>

---

### Recommended Citation

Alicia Menechino, *A Tribute to Dean Richard L. Ottinger*, 16 Pace Envtl. L. Rev. 591 (1999)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.58948/0738-6206.1331>

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.pace.edu/pelr/vol16/iss2/8>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Law at DigitalCommons@Pace. It has been accepted for inclusion in Pace Environmental Law Review by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Pace. For more information, please contact [dheller2@law.pace.edu](mailto:dheller2@law.pace.edu).

# FAREWELL TRIBUTE

## A Tribute to Dean Richard L. Ottinger

ALICIA MENECHINO\*

For most students at Pace University School of Law, their first contact with Dean Ottinger occurred a few days into classes when the Dean visited each entering class to personally greet the students and elicit comments and questions regarding our concerns. Right away, the stage was set: Ottinger was an approachable Dean. For most, this was an unusual occurrence. From our past collegiate experiences, the Dean was a name on letterhead and merely a figurehead of the school's administration. We nearly reeled from the shock: an approachable Dean, a Dean who was interested in what we had to say, who actually wanted to ease our transition into law school and make our future secure. Even at that point, so early in our law school careers, we realized that Dean Ottinger was a figure to be remembered. We decided that this was a man whose inspiring personal and professional history was worth learning about.

Richard Lawrence Ottinger was born in Westchester County, New York on January 27, 1929. He received a Bachelor of Arts in Government from Cornell University in 1950 and graduated with a law degree from Harvard Law School three years later. That same year, Ottinger joined the United States Air Force to fight in the Korean War. A true patriot, Ottinger accelerated quickly, advancing to the rank of Captain and twice achieving honors for distinguished service. He

---

\* Case Note & Comment Editor, *Pace Environmental Law Review*, J.D. Received May 1999. Assistance in the preparation of this essay was graciously provided by Michael Ohm, Shavaun Morrissey and Doreen Lusita.

chose not to reenlist in 1955 and, instead, decided to pursue his legal career.

Ottinger became an associate for Cleary, Gottlieb, Friendly & Hamilton in New York City for one year. In 1956, Ottinger became a partner at Kridel, Malone & Spear and remained there until 1960. In addition, he resumed his studies, specializing in international law at Georgetown Law Center where he received a specialized degree in international law in 1961. Among Ottinger's most shining accomplishments, immediately after graduating from Georgetown, he co-founded the Peace Corps and served as the Director of Latin American programs from 1961-64.

While working with the Corps, Ottinger received a call from the Westchester County Democratic chairman, asking if he would like to run for Congress. Ottinger gave it a shot and won. The first Congressman to win on an environmental issue, Saving the Hudson, Ottinger ultimately served in the House of Representatives for a total of sixteen years, from 1964-1970 and then from 1974-1984, representing New York's 20<sup>th</sup> Congressional District in Westchester County.

While working on a variety of legislative issues, Ottinger left important legacies in the area of environmental law. As a Congressman, his efforts on behalf of the environment have been described as a "David" against any possible "Goliath," "one of the earliest environmentalists in Congress," and one of the best-known experts in the area of energy conservation. While Ottinger's influences include John F. Kennedy, Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, the Boy Scouts of America are to thank for initially spurring Ottinger's interest in the environment. As a Representative, far from his scouting days, Ottinger took a particularly strong stance in the arena of energy conservation and in advocating government-backed solar and energy conservation projects. As a member of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce, he chaired the Subcommittee on Energy, Conservation and Power. He founded the Environment and Energy Study Conference, the largest bipartisan, bicameral caucus in Congress. He was known for taking a rather skeptical stand on nuclear power while promoting stronger controls. He was also a member of

the Committee on Science and Technology, where he fought against such programs as funding for the Clinch River breeder reactor in Tennessee, and served on the Subcommittee of Energy Development and Applications. He was one of the principal authors of the Public Utility Regulatory Policies Act (PURPA). As a Congressman, he was also critical of President Reagan's "failure to pursue arms control" to prevent "the threat of accidental nuclear war" and worked to curtail nuclear proliferation.

Truly dedicated to bettering the environment of his own constituency, Ottinger is most proud of passing the Hudson River Compact Act. The Act provided for an interstate compact between New York, New Jersey, and the federal government to protect and plan for the Hudson River, and has resulted in the building of five pollution treatment plants around the Hudson. To Ottinger's honor, the Act is touted as the first and only bill passed by a first term Congressman in his or her own name and was, in fact, the first bill passed through Ottinger's efforts.

Other highlights of his congressional career include the establishment, with ten other House members, of the Environmental and Energy Study Conference, a private organization dedicated to providing objective information and analysis on environmental and energy issues to aid Congressional decision-making.

Upon his retirement from Congress, Ottinger was praised by then Governor Cuomo for "his voice of reason and for his compassion and integrity." Further praise from all quarters emphasized Ottinger's active brand of representation. Westchester town and country officials observed that he was an extremely visible Congressman who worked hard to secure Federal aid for projects ranging from flood control to a veterans memorial.

Ottinger received Honorary Doctor of Law degrees from the College of New Rochelle and Mercy College. In 1997, he was an Honoree at the Annual Meeting of the Federated Conservationists of Westchester County, Inc. Ottinger has also received over twenty awards from various organizations, including the National Community Action Foundation, the So-

lar Energy Industry Association and the American Society for Public Administration 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Distinguished Service Award.

After serving sixteen years in Congress, Ottinger desired to continue his influence in molding the legal community. Upon retiring from Congress in 1984, the Westchester native came 'home' to Pace University School of Law to fulfill his lifetime goal of teaching. Pace was a promising, up-and-coming law school that met with Ottinger's desire to spend his time teaching environmental legal issues in the classroom and also lobbying on behalf of environmental causes.

Ottinger continued to influence people in the areas of environmental law as a professor in Pace University School of Law's environmental law program. While a professor, Ottinger taught several environmental law courses including Environmental Law, Scientific and Technological Issues in Environmental Law, and the Legislative Process, his favorite class being, naturally, Environmental Law. Ottinger looks fondly upon his teaching days and was most inspired by the students. The same qualities that made Ottinger stand out in Congress for sixteen years carried over into the classroom and made him a highly respected and well-liked professor.

Ottinger was named co-director of the law school's Center for Environmental Legal Studies in 1984. Ottinger founded and became director of the Energy Project, a consortium that raises about \$900,000 per year advocating utility investment in conservation and renewable energy resources as well as the replacement of power plants in six states, including New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Florida, Louisiana and also Puerto Rico.

In the summer of 1994, Ottinger was named Acting Dean of Pace University School of Law, and in December 1994, he was named Dean. As Dean, Ottinger no longer taught classes but devoted his time to the administration of the school and remained co-director of the Center for Environmental Legal Studies and director of the Energy Project. A memorable Dean, Ottinger is acclaimed for his outreach to, and inclusion of students in all matters affecting the school, increasing faculty collegiality, and his outreach to the corporate and

practice bars. In addition, Ottinger's work as Dean brought Pace an L.L.M. program, a new classroom building and the first capital campaign which raised over two million dollars for the school. Ottinger's dedication accounts for the growth of centers of excellence, including the Social Justice Center, and the Land Use Law Center, as well as the appointment of Professor Westerman as Director of International Programs.

Ottinger's work as Dean, his Energy Project, and his involvement as co-director of the Center for Environmental Legal Studies helped to bring national acclaim to Pace University School of Law's environmental law program, which is consistently rated by *U.S. News and World Report* among the top three environmental law programs in the country.

Along with his duties as a professor, co-director of the Center for Environmental Legal Studies, and ultimately, as Dean, Ottinger continued advocating environmental issues as a scholar, with his voice as well as his pen. He spoke about environmental issues on numerous occasions, including addressing the United Nations on energy and the environment in the development process. Since becoming a faculty member at Pace University School of Law, Ottinger's most memorable speaking event was a discussion with the faculty at Pace regarding the Hudson River Compact Act and how it was passed. While at Pace University School of Law, he continued advocating environmentalism by publishing several books and numerous articles dealing with environmental law and energy policy. All of this continued to bolster Pace University School of Law's reputation in the legal community, as well as reaffirm Ottinger's reputation as one of the most influential people in the area of environmental law.

When asked to share some memories of his time at Pace, Ottinger immediately calls the students to mind and believes his interactions with them are primarily responsible for his satisfaction as Dean. In addition, he fondly recalls his experiences with Pace's projects, including the Environmental Moot Court and the Vienna Moot Court, and with Pace's student organizations, including the International Law Society and the Student Bar Association.

Although the students and faculty at Pace do not look forward to Ottinger's absence as Dean, we are heartened by the fact that he will remain present at the Energy Project, will lecture at Pace, and will assist in fund raising for the school as well as other special projects. In addition, Ottinger has the utmost confidence in the new Dean, David S. Cohen, and feels that Cohen will do spectacularly. Ottinger points out that Cohen's student-oriented nature and hands-on approach elevated the University of Victoria to one of the top schools in Canada and will benefit Pace.

Graduation at Pace University School of Law in the spring of 1999 was a bitter-sweet event: the farewell to an incredible Dean and the beginning of a new era by inducting Richard Lawrence Ottinger as an honorary graduate of Pace University School of Law.