

Thomas McHenry Welcomed as Dean and President at Vermont Law School



Summary: Vermont's only law school welcomed a new dean and president to their school that will continue to grow their already strong environmental law capabilities.

Vermont Law School has a new president and dean. Thomas McHenry is taking on the position of leading the law school, a change from his previous position as an environmental lawyer in Los Angeles for Gibson Dunn & Crutcher. While some many think McHenry is getting too old to be taking on such a role, more and more attorneys are working past the typical retirement age of 65.

McHenry said, "This job actually came up out of the blue, which was wonderful for me, because it's kind of the job of my dreams." Vermont Law was ranked as the number one school for environmental law last year by U.S. News and World Report making his addition to the school a valuable one. McHenry will not only handle the managerial and administrative aspects of the law school but will also have the opportunity to teach.

With all the modifications to climate change in the forms of laws and regulations, Vermont anticipates staying on top. The law school provides a comprehensive legal education to all its students although they are a third tier law school. The school currently charges \$47,000 a year for tuition, making them a cheaper option than the big cities. McHenry wants to work on improving the reputation of their program overall.

McHenry's new job will not be an easy one. The legal industry is extremely competitive with law firms reducing their costs in new and innovative ways. For some firms, this may mean cutting summer associate positions, using contract lawyers, or taking advantage of technology to do some of the work. This means that JD graduates have a hard time finding positions where they can use their legal degree and McHenry will have to find a way to help his students through this maze to find prime jobs.

Vermont is a smaller state but with only one law school in the state, his students may face slightly less competition in their area to secure jobs. This is where their focus on environmental law comes in. The law school has responded to their community's needs and that was in environmental issues.

McHenry teaches a class on the history of environmental law, noting that the practice has changed significantly in the past 30 years or so. When he started out in the field in the 1980's, federal agencies had just started increasing enforcement of environmental laws and regulations. When he joined Gibson Dunn in the 1990's, law firms were starting to view environmental law as a profitable area. They realized the practice was more than just litigation.

McHenry said, "Today, I don't think you can do a large transaction without having an environmental lawyer take a look at it. Unless maybe if it's something to do with software."

Even with the unlikelihood of any big changes by the federal government to environmental legislation in the near future, there are still changes at the state and local levels. President Donald Trump has announced his plans to reduce environmental laws but McHenry notes that any changes are work for graduates. He said, "There's always opportunity for big law attorneys when there is change."

Do you think more changes need to be made to environmental law? Should there be more or less regulations? Tell us your thoughts in the comments below.

To learn more about environmental law, read these articles:

- [JD Journal Names California's Top Environmental Law Firms](#)
- [Looking for In-House Environmental Attorney Jobs in Cincinnati?](#)
- [Spring 2017 State of the Market Report](#)

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