SC Justice Urbigkit strives to protect individual rights

Walter Urbigkit, BA '49, LLB '51, has a major goal in mind in carrying out his duties as Wyoming Supreme Court chief justice — protecting an individual's rights from abuse.

"For me, the challenge of the law is the responsibility to try to maintain the sanctity and sacrosanctness of the Constitution," he says. In doing so, Urbigkit and his colleagues face an increasing challenge. "We have to support and sustain law enforcement, but cannot in that effort dispense constitutional protections."

"In the past seven years in law, there has been an unbelievable regression in the Bill of Rights protection of individuals and the sanctity of the home," he adds. Still, Urbigkit serves to do his part to uphold the law of the land and to protect individual rights, even when his efforts are unpopular.

One such case occurred this summer, when he filed an 89-page dissent in the Wyoming Supreme Court's affirmation of a conviction of Brock Springman on conspiracy to commit kidnapping. The Supreme Court overturned an earlier rape and kidnapping conviction in this case, but affirmed the lower court's conviction.

Urbigkit based his dissent on what he considered violations of the individual's rights. "It was a popular move, but he felt the integrity of the judicial process was at stake.

Urbigkit acknowledges that his opinion on issues will help shape society in years to come. "This is an architectural challenge."

His 1985 appointment to the Wyoming Supreme Court consumed a long-time dream for Urbigkit, who says that, "from a very early age, I had an interest in the judiciary." From his childhood in Crowheart, Wyo., he held onto the dream of becoming an attorney and — ultimately — a judge.

UW the Natural Choice

Urbigkit says attending UW on his way to a legal career was an easy decision to make, and he made the most of the opportunities he had there. Once on campus, Urbigkit studied political science and economics and excelled in the classroom. He graduated with honors.

Urbigkit competed on the UW debate team for three years. His mentor was William Stephens, a "brilliant and unusual individual" who challenged his understanding to be thoughtful, forthright activities.

Founder of the UW Independent Students Association, Urbigkit was also a member of Phi Beta Kappa, Phi Kappa Phi and Delta Sigma Rho. Because he was very poor, these extracurricular activities were the only real opportunity he had to travel and to learn more about the world.

One incident in 1947 brought Urbigkit a certain degree of notoriety, and nearly had him kicked out of school. Urbigkit and some friends published an underground publication called "Common Sense," in which they questioned the trustees' orders to review books for subversive material. The probe, a response to the hysteria created by Sen. Joseph McCarthy's investigations into suspected communists, didn't spark any censorship, but it did stir up emotions on campus.

Law school went well for Urbigkit, who graduated first in his class in 1951. During 1951-52, he served as student body president (the first non-greek that anyone could remember) and editor-in-chief of the Wyoming Law Journal.

Urbigkit devoted as many as 110 hours of study per week during his first year, but successive terms became easier. In law school, he developed many fond friendships that lasted after commencement.

Some of his classmates who remained close friends within the law practice in this state were Bill Jones, Harry Leimbach, Harry Harris, Vince Rexx, Bob Wanet, Paul T. Llamas, Thomas Whiteley, Cecil Hughes, Bob Costin and Henry T. Jones. (Hughes, Costin and Henry Jones are now deceased.)

Life as a Lawyer

After graduation and two years in the United States Infantry, Urbigkit fulfilled his lifelong dream and became a trial lawyer — he even founded the Wyoming Trial Lawyers Association. In private practice, Urbigkit took on all types of cases, developing a strong business law clientele. He also took several criminal defense cases and frequently represented plaintiffs in damage claims.

But trial work was Urbigkit's first love. He thrived on the challenge and the dynamic nature of that field.

"A good trial lawyer is really a gambler," Urbigkit says. "You have a client walk in the door, and he'll have a problem about which you know absolutely nothing. But if it's a significant case, by the time you've finished with it, you're going to have to know more than the experts do." This line of work requires a "studious capacity" and plenty of hard work.

A Legislative Leader

Over the years, Urbigkit has demonstrated a devotion to public service. That included two terms in the Laramie County Welfare Board (one as chairman), nine years on the Laramie County School District 1 Board (two years as chairman), 10 years on the Wyoming State Selective Service Appeal Board (four years as chairman), and two years on the Laramie County Planning Commission. However, he may be best known for his 12 years in the Wyoming House of Representatives.

Urbigkit had been active in state politics for several years when he decided in 1972 to run for the Wyoming House. With a lot of legwork of his own, and from his wife, Marian, Urbigkit finished near the top in Laramie County balloting that year.

Increasing the permanent funds available from severance taxes and modernization of Wyoming's criminal law ranked high on Urbigkit's priority list early on. He also advocated strong support for UW and the Wyoming bar.

As a member of the minority (Democratic) party, Urbigkit faced some rough water. The slowdown, stratification and ceremonial nature of the legislative process frustrated him, but he learned to work within that system.

The period in which he served saw many historic battles. For example, Urbigkit and his colleagues debated several tax, legalized abortion and a four-year college in Casper. He saw the defeat of a medical school at the university and the establishment of the Cheyenne and Casper Family Practice Residency Programs.

Any reasonable proposal could earn bipartisan support, according to Urbigkit. In fact, he says the failure to approve a medical school was the only time in his 12 years that a joint group did not succeed. A legislator could not afford to make permanent enemies, because he or she might need their support tomorrow, according to (Continued on page 10)
Shogren shines as outstanding young ISU researcher

By Jason Shogren, PhD '86, says winning the Iowa State University Foundation Award for Early Achievement in Research was "a great honor," but it's merely icing on the cake for doing a job he truly loves.

Shogren, an associate professor of economics at ISU, appreciates the honor — especially since the recognition comes from his peers. But he admits his greatest joy comes from the job itself.

"It's like a big sandbox," Shogren says of the creative process. "a lot of fun." At ISU, Shogren heads Resource and Environmental Policy Division in the Center for Agriculture and Rural Development. A significant portion of his time is spent doing research for agencies like the Environmental Protection Agency. For example, Shogren is project leader of a multidisciplinary team constructing a simulation model to design pesticide use policies.

Even with a heavy research schedule, Shogren still manages to put in some classroom time at ISU. He teaches one graduate-level course in his specialty area, environmental economics. His previous faculty position, at Appalachian State University in North Carolina, also included teaching time.

The coming year offers a change of scenery for Shogren. He will spend 1993 as a visiting professor in the Yale University School of Forestry and Environmental Studies. While there, Shogren will engage in both teaching and research, working primarily with graduate students in environmental studies. His goal in working with these individuals will be to help them understand the impact of economics on their own academic areas.

Early Influences

Shogren steered towards a career in academia from an early age. As a youngster, he loved to spend time in the library reading and researching topics of interest. (One sixth grade assignment on Japan yielded a 40-page report.)

Shogren also drew inspiration from two professor uncles, who spoke highly of the academic lifestyle.

Shogren's first major as an undergraduate at the University of Minnesota-Duluth was accounting, but he discovered early that this wasn't right for him. Economics didn't look promising in the beginning, either. Shogren failed his first introductory economics test and was close to a D entering his second. An exchange student, he sought advice from his professor, Ray Roub.

With Roub's help, Shogren began to understand the subject matter, to retain what he learned and even enjoy doing so.

An emphasis on environmental economics evolved out of his experiences growing up in northern Minnesota and his long-time interests in outdoor resources. That's why Shogren came to ISU for his PhD work — in environmental economics program, led by faculty members Tom Crocker and Ralph D'Arge, was recognized as a top-quality department.

Shogren's graduate work examined the economics of risk, specifically, the interaction between public and private involvement in dealing with risk. Once private mechanisms are introduced, he says, the process becomes more complicated, but also more rich. Shogren says there is a lot of potential to influence public policy, as decision makers begin to contemplate private and collective mechanisms. Response of policy makers to his findings has been largely positive.

Shogren's research took him to Sweden in his third year of graduate school. While there, he studied under some of the leading experts in the field of environmental economics at the University of Stockholm and the Stockholm School of Economics. Shogren did a lot of the groundwork for his dissertation while there. He also gained self-confidence in this experience, because the Swedes judged him solely on his abilities and accepted him.

Shogren had little difficulty fitting into his new environment. His ancestors were Swedish, and he grew up in a portion of Minnesota with a heavy Scandinavian influence. Consequently, he was familiar with the culture, and some of the language before going overseas. When he arrived in Sweden, Shogren found he and his colleagues spoke another common language — economics. Regardless of the miles of ocean separating them, he says environmental economists share the same common philosophies about their field. Shogren found only one major difference between his own experience and that of his Swedish counterpart. The Swedes in Stockholm had direct ties to their government and, therefore, had more visible impact on policy making.

That year overseas was a big risk academically for Shogren, but he says both he and the UW Economics Department benefited from his experience. He returned to Laramie a much different student, one who shared his new perspective with others in the department.

Warm Wyoming Memories

The camaraderie Shogren developed with the department's faculty and other graduate students continues on a professional basis today. He maintains weekly contact with Crocker, with whom he has co-authored numerous papers over the years. Shogren also collaborates with other former students on professional projects and continues to foster a close bond with many of them.

Shogren and his wife, Deh, have a 4-year-old daughter, Maju. The Shogrens enjoyed Laramie during the three years they spent there, taking advantage of such outdoor activities as camping and hiking in between study sessions. Shogren says they have even considered purchasing property near Centennial for a vacation spot.

Walter Urbigkit...

(Urbigkit, Cooperation was critical, Still, a minority party member in the House faced plenty of frustration.

"It's a cold-blooded business," he says of politics. "Many times, it takes a matter of who could kill bills faster than the others. Urbigkit, one-time minority House leader, took on an "enforce" role within capitol politics. He also developed a reputation as an adept legislator who could hold his own against even the most worthy opponents.

Colleagues recognized his abilities. In 1973, they named him most effective orator; and in 1983, they chose him as the most effective legislator in the House.

Urbigkit enjoyed his years in the Legislature; but when he retired from the House floor for the last time, he closed that chapter of his life. With the exception of committee appearances in connection with his Supreme Court duties, he has never been back.

"When you leave, you leave," Urbigkit says.

Urbigkit and his wife, Marian (Chilton), have four children: Marcia (35), Cynthia (34), Robert (33) and Brenda (30).

Over the years, he has been active in several organizations, including:

American Bar Association, Tenth Circuit Bar Association, Laramie County Bar Association, American Board of Trial Advocates, First Presbyterian Church, American Legion, Young Men's Literary Club, American Association of Retired Persons, Wyoming Heritage Society, Cowboy Joe Club and Cheyenne Quarterback Club. He was a member of several other organizations, that he had to resign when he accepted the Supreme Court appointment.

Mortar Board plans anniversary party, scholarship fund in 1993

Chapter of Mortar Board was founded at UW. Since that date, 862 members have been initiated; all are invited to attend the festivities. Specifics will be announced at the time approaches. Watch the ALUMNEWS for a registration form.

E. Luella Galliver, dean of women emerita and founder of the Wyoming chapter, died in November 1991. A memorial scholarship is being established in her name to be awarded to a Mortar Board member for graduate study. Those wishing to contribute toward the memorial may send checks to Mortar Board indicating "for deposit only account #18033-005."

Mailing address for the scholarship fund is:

UnivWyoming Employees Credit Union
P.O. Box 7217
Laramie, WY 82071.

SEPTEMBER 1992