

The Honorable M. Margaret McKeown

Distinguished UW Alumna

Everyone's freshman year in college is life-changing. Casper native Margaret McKeown's, however, was particularly eye-opening.

This was 1969—the year of the Black 14, when in mid-October 14 football players were dismissed for wearing black armbands before the BYU game to protest LDS policy against African-Americans.

“The topic dominated every class,” McKeown says. “It gave me a heightened awareness of race relations and discrimination issues that I then took on to law school and my later work.”

It was also the year that Dean of Women Margaret Tobin and members of the Association of Women Students agitated for change to university rules that enforced different curfew hours on female students than on male students. Even as a freshman, McKeown took an active role—she was the AWS representative for White Hall.

“It was my first realization about issues related to gender discrimination, because there were restrictions on hours for women but not for men,” McKeown says. “I remember thinking that the disparity was unfair and that something should be done about it.”

She adds, “In a very odd way, I had a fabulous freshman year. Best of all, I made lifelong friends with whom I travel every year.”

What did she do with this heightened awareness? First, she did a semester abroad in Spain and graduated from UW a year early with her bachelor's degree in international relations and



Spanish. She then earned a law degree from Georgetown University.

While in college, she worked both in Washington, D.C., and Wyoming as a staff member for U.S. Sen. Cliff Hansen, who earlier had piqued her interest in a legal career. To this day, she admires Sen. Hansen: “The most important thing about Sen. Hansen was that he loved people. He was someone who reached across the aisle, very much a bipartisan senator. He never forgot the important values of Wyoming and what the constituents of Wyoming needed, but he also had a broader view than just Wyoming, recognizing he was part of the whole United States Senate.”

She adds, “He was a great mentor, and I think a real role model as a politician and as a participant in public service.”

The first woman partner in the firm of Perkins Coie, McKeown practiced in Washington, D.C. and Seattle and became an international expert in digital and intellectual property law, with clients including Boeing, Nintendo and Amazon.

“When I started out, I didn't know I would have a career in the digital world,” she says. “You need to be open to opportunities and not start with a strict construct of where you think things might go. Opportunity is in the unknown.”

She served as a White House Fellow under presidents Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan. The program takes promising leaders early in their careers and brings them into the government at the highest level. She served as special assistant to U.S. Secretary of the Interior Cecil Andrus and as a special assistant at the White House.

Her hard work and dedicated public service then culminated in a well-earned honor—she was confirmed as a 9th Circuit Court of Appeals Judge, where she has served for almost 20 years.

Chief Justice John Roberts also asked her to chair the judges committee on ethics, a testament to her standing in the legal community, and her name has come up as a possible U.S. Supreme Court nominee.

“I'm passionate about making the world be a better place,” McKeown says. That she has—in her public service in all three branches of government and beyond.