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Repetti Gives Inaugural Kenealy Lecture

10/19/2009--Boston College Law School Professor James Repetti, the first holder of the William J. Kenealy, S.J. Professorship, gave his inaugural lecture on October 9, 2009.

Click here to watch video of lecture

A leading tax scholar, Repetti's lecture explored the role of economic analysis in determining the future of our tax system. Repetti noted that concerns about fairness, administrability and economic efficiency had traditionally played equal roles in the design of our tax system. In the past twenty years, however, concerns about economic efficiency appear to have become dominant in the debate about the best system. Professor Repetti argued that economic efficiency should not play a greater role in structuring our tax system than concerns about the system's fairness and administrability because the anticipated gains from economic efficiency are no more certain than gains associated with fairness and administrability.

At a dinner given in honor of Repetti, former student Dina Ciarimboli, class of 1994 and general counsel of Prism Venture, said he "influenced her professional career and life more profoundly" than anyone she had encountered in her educational career.

"He taught me what no one up until that point had been able to--the ability to break down a complex subject matter into simple pieces that fit together seamlessly, without effort and make perfect sense," Ciarimboli said. "He taught me how to teach myself."

Repetti was appointed as the first The Rev. William J. Kenealy, SJ, Professor at the start of this academic year. The Professorship is named in honor of the member of the Law School’s first class who went on to serve as dean of the school from 1939-1956.

Repetti joined the faculty of BC Law School in 1986 and has been recognized for both research and teaching. Hailed as a leading tax law scholar and the author of seminal work in his field, he also was selected by the student body to be the first recipient, in 1999, of the Law School's award for excellence in teaching.


He has written numerous articles on taxation for law reviews and other journals across the nation, including "Democracy and Opportunity: A New Paradigm in Tax Equity" in the Vanderbilt Law Review, which this year won the Boston College Law School prize for scholarship. Also this year, the U.S. Joint Committee on Taxation devoted several pages of its report, Taxation of Wealth Transfers Within a Family, to a discussion of Repetti’s proposal to eliminate the estate tax on family businesses and farms, and his critique of the existing rules.
Repetti has acted as a consultant to the Internal Revenue Service and Justice Department, and has appeared as a commentator in publications such as the Christian Science Monitor, Forbes Magazine, the Wall Street Journal and Massachusetts Lawyer's Weekly.

A 1975 magna cum laude graduate of Harvard College, Repetti received his JD magna cum laude and MBA degrees from Boston College in 1980, after which he clerked for Judge Walter Skinner, then worked for five years at the Boston law firm Ropes & Gray. He also has served as a consultant for the IRS and Justice Department and as counsel to Hill & Barlow.

About Fr. Kenealy

Rev. William J. Kenealy, SJ, was appointed dean of Boston College in 1939. Fr. Kenealy earned his AB and AM degrees from Boston College and a PhD from the Gregorian University in Rome. He was enrolled in the first class at Boston College Law School in 1929 (though he subsequently earned his degree from Georgetown University). He also was a professor of classical Latin at Boston College and had supervised its Fulton Debating Society.

During his tenure as dean, the Law School saw a number of milestones, including an expansion of its full-time faculty members, a gift of more than 2,000 volumes from the law library of Supreme Judicial Court Associate Justice James B. Carroll which increased the school's total library volumes to 20,000, and, in 1940, a vote to admit women.

When the United States entered World War II, Fr. Kenealy took leave to serve as a U.S. Navy chaplain. When he returned to the deanship, he instituted the "Post-War Program" intended to help veterans through law school. He also toughened overall academic standards and initiated a law review to publicize the scholarly work of both professors and students.

Fr. Kenealy also pressed for the construction of a separate building for the law school, away from its location in a Boston office building. In 1953, he arranged purchase from the City of Boston of the property upon which St. Thomas More Hall was built. It served as the site of the Law School from 1954 - 1975, when it moved to its present site on BC's Newton Campus.

Fr. Kenealy, who had retired from teaching in 1969, died in 1975.