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FORUM

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May 4, 2010

A thank you to Walter -- and a welcome to Ted

Over the last few days, many of our loyal readers have likely noticed an increase in blogging activity from our longtime contributor, Ted Frank, and a decrease in postings by our founding editor, Walter Olson. As the Manhattan Institute announced this morning, Walter is leaving us after years of service to join the Cato Institute as a senior fellow. Ted will be joining the Institute as an adjunct fellow and primary editor of this site.

Not only this site but the Manhattan Institute's entire project on litigation reform -- what developed into the Center for Legal Policy, which I have directed since 2003 -- owes its very existence to Walter Olson. In the mid-1980s, Bill Hammett, then president of the Institute, decided to develop a research agenda dedicated to studying American civil litigation. At that time, litigation in this country had already exploded, but the causes and effects of the profound shift in the nation's legal landscape were only beginning to be understood.

To lead the Manhattan Institute's research agenda, Hammett turned to Walter Olson, then a young scholar at the American Enterprise Institute who edited its *Regulation* magazine (which has subsequently shifted locales to Cato, Walter's new home). Trained in economics, Olson brought together many of the brightest minds in the legal and economic disciplines; the early thoughts of the group were published in a 1988 volume he edited, entitled *New Directions in Liability Law*. Also that year, the Institute sponsored its first full-length book on litigation, *Liability*, published by lawyer and scientist Peter Huber; Walter commissioned this book, and both he and Peter would remain critical to our research efforts in this field over the next quarter century.

Walter went on to publish three books of his own, 1991's *The Litigation Explosion*, 1997's *The Excuse Factory*, and 2003's *The Rule of Lawyers*. Each was well reviewed and highly influential. He has testified before Congress, made hundreds of media appearances, and written scores of papers and opinion pieces.

In addition, as our readers know, Walter pioneered communication on the internet about legal issues. His well-read Overlawyered.com, launched in 1999, was -- as best we can tell -- the first legal weblog. In 2004, Walter conceived and guided the launch of the Manhattan Institute's in-house legal web platform, our own Point of Law. Walter will continue to blog on Overlawyered and to return here from time to time.

The upcoming year promises to be an exciting one for Walter, as next winter, he's scheduled to publish his fourth book, which chronicles the intellectual escapades that have permeated out of the legal academy in the last few decades. Having read draft chapters, I can attest that the book is both illuminating and readable, with Walter's trademark insight and wit. I look forward to promoting that book -- and all of Walter's writings -- here and in other Manhattan Institute forums. He's changing homes, but we at MI continue to be enthusiastic about Walter's ongoing efforts, and I know I'll continue to turn to him for wisdom and insight about all matters of legal policy.

Our friends at Cato have hired themselves a good one, and I can speak for everyone at the Manhattan Institute in saying that Walter will be sorely missed. He displays none of the arrogance one might expect of someone so accomplished, and he has consistently treated everyone at MI, scholar and staff alike, with uncommon warmth and grace. I value him not only for his encyclopedic knowledge but as a dear friend and an inspiring husband and father.

CATEGORIES:
Miscellaneous

While Walter is irreplaceable, I am very pleased that Ted Frank has agreed to join us as an adjunct fellow and editor of this site. A founding contributor to Point of Law, Ted brings deep experience in litigation through years of private practice. He led legal reform research at the American Enterprise Institute, and he recently has been making waves as the founder and president of the Center for Class Action Fairness, which fights collusive settlements of frivolous class litigation. Although stylistically different from Walter, Ted is a proven blogger on legal issues -- with a similar indefatigable commitment to the cause -- and I am confident that our readers will be well served by his new leadership.

POSTED BY JAMES R. COPLAND AT 12:10 PM | [TRACKBACK \(0\)](#)

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