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## Omaha Bar Association Memorial Service

May 21, 2014

Chief Justice Michael G. Heavican

*Editor's Note: The following are Chief Justice Michael G. Heavican's reflections that were delivered at the Omaha Bar Association Memorial Day program.*

Fellow judges, members of the bar, families, friends and honored guests. Ralph Waldo Emerson said that "it is not length of life, but depth of life" that matters. Today we gather to reflect upon the lives of those taken from us. We gather not only to mourn their passing, but also to celebrate their achievements, the depth of their lives.

The length of life is almost always too short, and it was certainly too short for each of the lawyers we celebrate today. But we have little or no control over the length of our lives. It is the depth of our lives that each of us can define.

Every lawyer innately wants to do good, has a special opportunity to do good, a special opportunity to explore and demonstrate the depth of life.

This year, the Omaha Bar Association commemorates the loss of 17 lawyers. Seventeen lawyers, all of whom did good things for their clients, their families, and their communities. Seventeen lawyers who exemplify what depth of life really means.

Many of you are attending today because one of those lawyers was your loved one. Please accept my sincere condolences for your loss.

Also accept my thanks for supporting your loved one in his or her practice of the law. It is the lawyer's lot in life to handle the problems of others. And those that we lost did much for their clients and for their community.

Over the last year we have lost a judge and a law professor, as well as many that served in the military, including as jag officers. We remember those who served their clients on civil rights and social justice issues, and those who helped define our constitution as constitutional lawyers.

Others helped their clients in workers' compensation, insurance, probate, estate, and general litigation matters. We honor those who served clients in corporate and securities law. Several more of those we remember represented many of Omaha's most well-known corporations as in-house counsel.

In short, the attorneys lost were accomplished professionals, in private practice, government service, and the academy. They were litigators, estate planners, professors, and judges. And in that capacity they were advocates, negotiators, mediators, observers, and authors. They strove to always improve themselves and others through their knowledge of the law and their sense of fairness and justice.

Loss reminds us that what really matters in life is our connections with other people. And the practice of law is, ultimately, about helping other people.

Attorneys play parts both big and small in making the lives of other people better. Whether litigating on behalf of a severely injured plaintiff or advising a couple planning for retirement, each of the 17 people lost dedicated their career to helping individuals in areas of their lives that were difficult to navigate alone.

Beyond what our loved ones did for a living, each also had a larger life. They were spouses and siblings. Parents and grandparents. Neighbors and friends. They were outdoorsmen, athletes, musicians, published authors, gardeners, and pet lovers. Many were passionate about their churches, politics, or social justice issues.

These 17 people were loved and admired by family, friends, and colleagues. Their passing leaves a hole in the hearts of many.

Our system of justice is better for the contributions of the colleagues we have lost. They taught us dedication to the practice of law and to those the law serves. They leave behind a legacy in the community that so many of them strived to improve, whether by military service, volunteerism, charitable contribution, or religious devotion. They are remembered for their wit, passion, and sense of duty.

We are better people for having known them. They will be missed. But the depth of their lives will not be forgotten. Each did good deeds for their clients, their families, their communities, and their profession. Each is a beacon for those of us who remain and strive to carry on their legacy.

Thank you.