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## A Judge of All Trades

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## A JUDGE OF ALL TRADES

HONORABLE KAREN K. KLEIN\*

I consider it a privilege to participate in this tribute to Judge Rodney S. Webb and congratulate him on this occasion. Judge Webb was appointed to the United States District Court in December 1987, about three years after my appointment as United States Magistrate Judge. He and I have operated as a case management team for the past fifteen years, and in my view, we have been a very successful team. We often meet to discuss general policy or procedure in a particular case, and inevitably find ourselves on the same wavelength. He often remarks how our judgment is "in synch," and I have never had to adjust my approach to a case in adaptation to his wishes. At all times he has shown deference for my decisions, but has never abdicated his ultimate responsibility as an Article III judge for those cases assigned to him. I am pleased that he respects my judgment because I certainly respect his.

As a jurist, Judge Webb has consistently maintained an open-minded, quick-studied, well prepared, and most importantly, even-handed manner. I do not hold this opinion alone. Lawyers often talk to me about the court and about Judge Webb specifically. They share my respect for him, and I know they speak candidly. As much as I respect Judge Webb's ability and performance as a jurist, I wish to note his achievements in another realm: Judge Webb deserves enormous credit for the new federal courthouse in Fargo and the state-of-the-art equipment in all the courthouses in our district.

Shortly after his appointment, Judge Webb initiated a planning committee to study an expansion of space in the Fargo courthouse. Ultimately the study showed that new construction was the only option to secure adequate courtroom space. Judge Webb persuaded Senator Quentin Burdick to secure a congressional appropriation of funds for the construction, and thereafter fought to preserve our precarious hold on those funds. When it became apparent that entirely new construction was not in the cards, Judge Webb spearheaded development of a plan to build an annex to the original courthouse and guided the process of acquiring adjacent land, vacating streets, and who knows what else. Throughout the design phase, he continually suggested innovations and challenged the proposed design,

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\* United States Magistrate Judge.

more than holding his own with a strong architect. He also proved himself a demanding taskmaster throughout the construction phase, keeping the project on track and reasonably on time. We now enjoy a courthouse that serves as a model of beauty and functionality. Although the courthouse appropriately bears Senator Burdick's name, it really is Judge Webb's "baby." His determination, persistence, and vision not only made it happen, but made it happen right.

As many know, Judge Webb is a real gadget freak, but not just for play. His real interest in technology lies in its ability to improve the delivery of justice. His service on a national committee on the "Electronic Courtroom" led to the incorporation of state-of-the-art video conferencing and evidence presentation systems in our courthouses. His innovative leadership will be a significant part of his legacy to the court. He truly is a judge of all trades.