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Letter to the Alumni of the Marshall-Wythe School of Law

William B. Spong, Jr.

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To the Alumni of the Marshall-Wythe School of Law:

This is the third in what I intend to be a twice yearly series of letters to all Marshall-Wythe alumni. I hope by this means to keep you reasonably well informed about events of interest at the Law School. If any of you have particular interests or concerns, do not hesitate to write or call. I will be pleased to answer your inquiry on an individual basis or, if it is of general interest, I will include additional information in a subsequent letter of this series.

During January and February I met with several hundred Marshall-Wythe alumni at five of our annual dinners held in Newport News, Norfolk, Richmond, Williamsburg and Fairfax County. My tenure as Dean has been short, but I have enjoyed few things more than the opportunity to meet and talk with our alumni. To see so many of you building careers and contributing to the professional and civic life of your communities is a source of inspiration to those of us who are working here at the Law School to create a center of legal learning of national repute. I know of no law school blessed with more loyal and generous alumni than Marshall-Wythe. I am certain that the faculty members who travelled to the alumni dinners with me in January and February share this view.

The most significant event of the past six months was, of course, the overwhelming approval Virginia voters gave to the state-wide bond issue in November. Our new building is now assured. In this connection, bids have already been received and opened for construction of the new building. The successful bid was low enough to give us hope that we may be able to add storage space that will be adequate to shelve an additional 50,000 library volumes. This space would be very helpful in our efforts to cope with a rapidly expanding library collection. In any event, construction should be underway by the time you receive this letter. We are told that the expected completion date is March 1, 1980.

We have recently had other good building-related news. The Cabell Foundation of Richmond has awarded the Law School a grant of $65,000 to assist in the construction of a model moot court room. We have also received an award from the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration in the amount of $154,080 to help complete this project. We are now working with the architects to plan an innovative, electronically equipped model court room that will be one of the two or three most advanced facilities of its kind in the nation.

Our new building will not be altogether futuristic. We are, after all, the oldest university-related law school in the country. We have been deeply honored by a generous gift from All Souls College of Oxford University in commemoration of the 200th anniversary of the creation of the first chair of law in America. All Souls has given us two large stained glass windows which memorialize two of its most illustrious graduates, Sir William Blackstone and Sir Christopher Wren. These windows were, for many years, located in the dining hall of All Souls. They were
removed at the beginning of World War II and were not reinstalled. I saw them last summer during a visit to England. They are truly beautiful. Now crated for shipment, we hope to receive them from England very soon. The architects assure us that they have reserved a place of honor in the new building for these very special gifts.

We are entering our busiest months in the admissions process. It appears that we will once again receive in excess of 2,000 applications for the 150 spaces available in the class of 1981. This is both gratifying and perplexing. We are, of course, happy that so many highly qualified applicants wish to study law at Marshall-Wythe. On the other hand, it is difficult to turn away young men and women whom we believe to have potential for the study and practice of law. Competition, however, is genuinely keen. Our present first year class, for example, has a median LSAT score of 632 and a median undergraduate grade point average of approximately 3.4. In making these difficult admissions decisions, we welcome your help. Letters of endorsement from alumni on behalf of outstanding applicants are of material assistance to us. You have my personal assurance that the admissions file of every applicant receives thorough, individual attention.

Finally, I am delighted to report that the National Center for State Courts has at last occupied its new headquarters building and is in full operation in Williamsburg. We look forward to a long and mutually beneficial collaboration with the National Center. At present, the National Center staff is devoting considerable attention to planning the second Williamsburg Conference on the State of the State Judiciary to be held March 17-22. Chief Justice Warren Burger and Attorney General Griffin Bell are among some of the distinguished legal figures from around the world who will participate. President Carter may also attend. Those few days in March promise to be an exciting time in Williamsburg.

After more than a year and a half as Dean, I remain optimistic about our future. We no longer face an indefinite term in an inadequate physical facility. Our students are bright; the faculty grows in experience and depth. Our alumni continue to generously share with us their time and resources. We are a community -- the faculty, students and alumni -- of a unique kind. Continued cooperation holds out the promise of a future more hopeful than any of us could have imagined a few short years ago. Yet that bright future for which we yearn is not assured. It must be earned. Those of us on the faculty are determined to maintain the forward progress of the last few years. I hope that in the months ahead we may also depend upon your continued interest and support.

Cordially,

William B. Spong, Jr.
Dean