

OBITUARY JEFFREY O'CONNELL

Jeffrey O'Connell, widely admired as a giant of insurance law reform, a virtuoso classroom teacher, and a scholar whose work directly impacted people's lives, died on January 6, 2013 in Charlottesville, Virginia.

Jeff conceived and actively championed the concept of "no fault" insurance. In this approach auto accident victims forego potentially large payments for pain and suffering in return for expedited payment of reimbursement for medical and auto repair costs. By removing the civil trial process this approach speeds up insurance payments by at least 2 1/2 years, reduces auto insurance premiums, and curbs ambulance-chasing, thus benefiting both accident victims and policyholders. It has been called "the most revolutionary reform in tort law in the past one hundred years."

Sixteen states have adopted some version of no fault insurance. More recently, Jeff fought to apply similar laws to medical malpractice cases. Not surprisingly, the trial bar has vigorously opposed both measures. Said Jeff, "If I had known tort reform would be this difficult I would have taken on something easier - like reformation of the Catholic Church."

Jeff spent 32 years at the University of Virginia Law School where he was the Samuel H. McCoy II Professor of Law. Previously he taught at the Universities of Iowa and Illinois. He was a visiting professor at numerous universities, including Oxford and Cambridge. He received two Guggenheim Fellowships and was honored by the American Bar Association with its Robert McKay Award. He wrote or co-wrote twelve books on insurance law.

At Dartmouth Jeff was a member of Psi Upsilon fraternity, Casque and Gauntlet and Phi Beta Kappa. He served as president of his class, Green Key and Palaeopitus. He received Best Actor awards while performing for the Dartmouth Players.

He attended the Harvard Law School and served in the U.S. Air Force in Korea from 1954-1957.

Jeff's wife Virginia died in 1994. He is survived by two children, four grandchildren, a sister and a brother, Tom '50, with whom he has authored several books, most recently "Five 20th Century College Presidents - From Butler to Bok (plus Summers)."