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William J. Pierce

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WILLIAM J. PIERCE

*Lawrence W. Waggoner**

Betty and Bill Pierce sit next to my wife, Lynne, and me at Michigan football games. But you know what? As often as not, neither Betty nor Bill is there. They are in Denver, or Atlanta, or Chicago, or Philadelphia, or Washington, or Boston, or Los Angeles, or some other city where one or more drafting committees of the National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws (the Conference) are meeting. Betty and Bill have been doing this at least since 1969, when Bill became the executive director of the Conference. Before taking that position, he had served as the president of the Conference, and before that, as a commissioner from Michigan. The Conference, as most lawyers know, is one of the two premier national organizations promoting law reform mainly in the sphere of private law, the other organization being the American Law Institute (ALI). Celebrating its 100th year, the Conference is the older of the two organizations, its founding having antedated the founding of the ALI by about three decades.

The Conference is a states-sponsored and -funded nonpolitical organization dedicated to promoting improvement and uniformity in state law. Its members, called Uniform Law Commissioners, are state-appointed. The Conference is, in fact, a confederation of state uniform law commissions. Each of the fifty states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico follows its own procedures for appointment of commissioners, who serve without pay. The more than 300 commissioners are drawn mainly from the ranks of practicing lawyers, legislators, judges, and academics. Many commissioners devote considerable quantities of time to Conference activities, but none more than Bill.

The Conference has two sides — production and sales. It produces uniform acts and then tries to sell them to state legislatures. Although Bill's duties involve him in both sides, I've seen Bill in action mainly on the production side. The production side can be as grueling as the sales side can be frustrating. In the end, the rewards of both sides lie in the self-satisfaction of knowing that you directly participated in the improvement of law affecting thousands and sometimes millions of your fellow citizens.

* Director of Research and Chief Reporter, Joint Editorial Board for the Uniform Probate Code; reporter of various uniform acts. — Ed.

The production side of the Conference takes place mainly in the operations of the drafting committees. Each uniform act in the making has a drafting committee. The chair and members of the committee must be commissioners. Noncommissioners can be involved as advisors, consultants, liaisons, or reporters, but only the commissioners have a vote. It normally takes at least two years to produce a uniform act. Drafting committees often meet twice or even three times a year. Committee meetings are intense, mentally and physically exhausting affairs. They typically start early Friday morning, go all day Friday, resume early Saturday morning and go all day, and then resume again early Sunday morning and go until noon, when the members scramble to make airplane flights to take them back home.

As an *ex officio* member of each committee, Bill attends portions of nearly all of these drafting committee meetings. His role is unique, not because of his office but because of his uncanny ability to size up and see solutions to problems that have stumped the "experts" in the field. Countless times, as reporter for one uniform act or another in the trusts and estates area, I have seen Bill sit silently as the rest of us argue to a deadlock on a problem, only to find that Bill is the one who comes up with the stroke of brilliance that gives the solution. His reputation on this score is widely known within the Conference. It seems that nearly all reporters and commissioners have similar stories to tell. Bill's imprint is on myriad uniform acts and hence state statutes in this country.

I know of few higher compliments to be paid a member of our profession than to say that he or she has worked selflessly, successfully, and directly to better American law. Bill Pierce has easily earned that praise.