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Tom Grennan (left) persuaded his old friend Dean McGrath to join his law firm of Gross & Welch. McGrath made a wintry trip to Omaha to meet the staff.

McGrath Brings Wealth of Experience Gross & Welch Now Has D.C. Affiliate

By Lorraine Boyd
The Daily Record

There's a new lawyer in town. Well, not exactly in town, but of counsel.

C. Dean McGrath Jr. has spent a great deal of his 30-plus-year legal career in Washington, D.C., navigating the murky waters of government.

He has served as deputy chief of staff to Vice President Dick Cheney; chief of staff to California Representative Christopher Cox; staff director, U.S. House of Representatives Select Committee on U.S. National Security and Military/Commercial Concerns with the People's Republic of China; senior attorney, American Automobile

Manufacturers Association; deputy assistant to the President and deputy staff secretary; general counsel for the Peace Corps; and acting general counsel, deputy general counsel, and associate general counsel for the Department of Transportation. McGrath was also special counsel, Office of the Secretary of Defense; associate counsel to the President; an attorney advisor, Department of the Treasury; and a special assistant U.S. Attorney for the District of Columbia.

Not a bad resume for a fellow raised in Grand Island, Neb. Actually, he quipped, “I’m the black sheep of the family. I come from 100 years of doctors.”

After leaving Manatt, Phelps & Phillips law firm in D.C., where he was a partner, McGrath opened his private practice – McGrath & Associates – in Washington D.C. where he specializes in government and regulatory law, including defense, homeland security, energy, transportation, healthcare, and tax matters, for non-Nebraska clients.

The graduate of Duke University (1975), the University of Nebraska College of Law (1978), and the National War College (1985), is also an adjunct professor with the Georgetown University Law Center.

Now, the Omaha law firm of Gross & Welch has announced his affiliation with them to make McGrath’s Washington D.C. resources available to clients in Nebraska. Although he’s lived on the East Coast for years, “In my heart, I still care about Nebraska,” he said.

Of Counsel

What will he do as a member of the Gross & Welch firm?

“The idea is that I’ll be able to help Nebraska clients deal with the byzantine nature of Washington.

“One of the things about lobbying is that the real key is information. Information is non-partisan, but what you need to be able to do is get information that is relevant, accurate and timely, in order to affect the outcome. I’ve been around Washington for a long time,” McGrath said.

He noted that some of the clients’ audiences are [members of] Congress. There is so much legislation that’s passed, he said, with no clue as to how it’s going to impact people and businesses in Nebraska.

“If you could just get their information to decision makers, you could affect the outcome in ways that could be materially better for Nebraska businesses.”

McGrath said the regulatory side of business – departments and agencies – write regulations every day, in ways that have probably deeper and more long-lasting effects than even the legislative side. ... “It is almost impossible to deal with the second and third and fourth tier effects of government regulation. But even on the first tier level, people don’t understand the ramifications.

“Take the Department of Transportation for example. A proposal to require children to be in child safety seats on aircraft sounds like a good idea, but in fact, it would end up killing more children than it saves.” He explained that because airline tickets are relatively expensive, if families were required to buy a ticket for their small children instead of holding them on their laps, they would opt to drive instead. And far more children are killed in car accidents than plane accidents.

“That’s the kind of thing where, with a little bit of issue spotting on behalf of the client, you might be able to bring information [like that] to the table to affect the outcome.

“My role is to facilitate the delivery of client-specific information to decision-makers in Washington. The idea is to help businesses, companies, clients in Nebraska to negotiate that system.”

He also said that brevity and conciseness is a virtue. “They don’t want a three-hour lecture. If you do go in for a meeting, you get one shot at this, don’t waste your time. Someone once said I wrote the best one-page memo.”

Nebraska Ties

His Nebraska ties led him to Gross & Welch. “I’ve known Tom Grennan for a long time. [Grennan is a shareholder in the firm, and also grew up in Grand Island.] A bunch of us from Grand Island have kept in touch over the years.”

After he started his own business, he began talking to another lawyer about going in together and associating with a New York-based firm.

“Then I thought, if I’m going to do this, why wouldn’t I do it with somebody in Nebraska? Someplace I know; someplace I have a lot more connections with. ... Last summer I came back here and met with everybody. It had the right feel to it.” And his oldest son Thomas attends UNL as well. He also has a daughter, Kelly, and a son, David, who are in high school in Virginia, where the family lives.

He is a member of the Nebraska State Bar Association and a trustee of the Grand Island Education Foundation.

War College

His resume includes the notation that he attended the National War College, National Defense University in 1984-85.

The college was conceived by then-General Dwight D. Eisenhower as a way to train “fast-burner” colonels in the issues besides military tactics and strategy that they were going to face, as he had to when he was supreme allied commander in WWII. Now, there are 160 handpicked students in a class: 40 each from the Army, Air Force, and Navy/Marines/Coast Guard; the other 40 made up of departments and agencies such as the State Department, the CIA, FEMA, and the Treasury Department, which has one slot.

McGrath was selected the Treasury Department's representative in the one-year program. "I was selected in part because I had done a lot of work with the general counsel on the post-Reagan assassination attempt report on how the Treasury had performed. At the time, the Secret Service was part of the Treasury. I also did a lot of work for the assistant secretary of enforcement operations and on a lot of emergency planning activities.

"It was very fascinating. Among my classmates were [former National Security Advisor] Jim Jones; the first person on the ground in the first Gulf War; Lt. Col. Rich Higgins, who was captured and tortured while part of the UN peacekeeping forces in Sinai; and Phil Pillsbury of *that* Pillsbury family. We have kept together over the years. And I contend I am the only person that is a Duke, Nebraska, and War College graduate!"

VP Cheney

McGrath has a wealth of stories about former Vice President Cheney. Suffice it to say that he said, "He gets a bum rap. If there's anybody that was absolutely prepared for the job at hand, it was Cheney. His first boss was Rumsfeld, who was a hard boss to work for. Then he went to the White House and eventually became Chief of Staff at 34 (for Pres. Gerald Ford). Later he served in Congress and became Secretary of Defense under Pres. George H. W. Bush, then became CEO of Halliburton, then Vice President.

McGrath noted that Cheney "is a sponge for information; he listens and files away. He's a listener, not a talker. He has a dry wit. He was a different kind of vice president; he harbored no illusion of becoming president, no hidden personal agenda. ... He was great to work for."

McGrath was working for Cheney in the Old Executive Office Building (now the Eisenhower Executive Office Building) the morning of 9/11. He described the scene – watching the planes on TV, and then his wife, Patricia Bryan, who is Deputy Senate Legal Counsel, calling to say the news was saying his building was on fire. Reassuring her, he hung up only to see the Secret Service running through the corridors telling everyone to evacuate; a plane was headed for the White House which was right across the street. The vice president was evacuated.

A few weeks later, his wife was too close for comfort to the anthrax scare; the powder was mailed to Sen. Tom Daschle, whose office was on the same floor as hers. Then the D.C. sniper struck. It was a scary time in Washington.

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