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Free Speech, Due Process and Trial by Jury

A Tribute to Alistair Byrne Dawson

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On Aug. 30, our firm and the broader legal community lost one of its brightest lights with the sudden passing of my partner and friend, Alistair Byrne Dawson. His loss is immeasurable.

For nearly three decades, Alistair embodied the very best of our profession: sharp intellect, fierce advocacy, unwavering integrity and boundless generosity of spirit. He was not only one of the finest trial lawyers I have ever known but also one of the finest human beings.

Alistair's story at Beck Redden began in 1993, the year after Joe Redden, Ron Secrest and I founded the firm. From the beginning, he stood out. He possessed that rare combination of brilliance and approachability. He was unshakably prepared in court yet always had time for a laugh in the hallway or a word of encouragement for a young associate. His presence lifted everyone around him.

A Trial Lawyer of Rare Ability

Alistair loved the courtroom. He relished the crucible of trial, the chance to stand before a judge and jury and advocate with clarity and conviction. His skill was evident early. At an age when most lawyers are still finding their footing, he was entrusted with cases involving some of the nation's most prominent executives and businesses.

He represented real estate magnate Sheldon Solow in a high-stakes dispute in New York. He led a case for Marvin Davis, the legendary oil wildcatter. He took on complex antitrust litigation for AT&T. These were not assignments giv-



From left: Partner Alex B. Roberts, Alistair B. Dawson and David J. Beck at the 2019 Texas Bar Foundation annual dinner.

en lightly nor to just anyone. Clients who could have hired any lawyer in the country chose Alistair. And they chose wisely.

Colleagues who stood beside him in court recall some of the most devastating cross-examinations they had ever witnessed. He could dismantle an opposing expert with surgical precision, exposing weaknesses while never losing his composure. He was relentless but never cruel; forceful but always professional. He respected the process and the people within it, even as he fought fiercely for his clients.

And yet, for all his trial successes, Alistair never measured his career solely in victories. He measured it in people — clients who trusted him, colleagues who grew under his mentorship, friends made through the shared endeavor of practicing law.

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My partner Russell Post shared, “Alistair embodied the best characteristics that we all wish to uphold in the practice of law. He was competitive and committed to the best interests of his clients but never at the expense of the integrity of the legal process. As a result, he was trusted by lawyers — including co-counsel and opposing counsel — and respected by the judges before whom he appeared.”

Reflecting on Alistair’s passing, U.S. District Judge Charles Eskridge of the Southern District of Texas shared, “I have known and admired Alistair in all my time on the bench and in practice. We started in private practice here in Houston at about the same time, and we worked on a number of cases and bar activities together over the years. He was a good man and an exceptional lawyer. And he was a true professional in every sense of the word, mentoring those in the law coming up behind him and always keeping service to the wider public close to heart. His loss will be felt deeply in the Texas legal community.”



Alistair with his wife, Wendy

A Leader Within the Firm

Alistair was a respected bar leader, serving as president of the Houston Bar Association and as chair of the Litigation Section of the State Bar of Texas. In addition, he served in leadership roles

in access to justice initiatives, including Houston Volunteer Lawyers, Lone Star Legal Aid and the Texas Equal Access to Justice Commission.

Alistair’s influence extended far beyond the courtroom. He was, in every sense, a builder of institutions. He believed passionately in the future of Beck Redden, and he worked tirelessly to shape that future.

As chair of our executive committee, as hiring partner and as an ever-present mentor, he guided the firm with vision and purpose. He was not afraid of hard conversations. He pushed us to do better — not for the sake of appearances but because he genuinely cared about making the firm a place where everyone could thrive.

Alistair understood something fundamental: The growth of our firm depended on the growth of its people. Time and again, he gave young lawyers opportunities that proved pivotal in their careers. One associate still remembers his first in-court speaking role, handed to him by Alistair when many senior lawyers would have kept the spotlight for themselves. Our partner Alex Roberts remembers being sent halfway across the globe to work with members of a Middle Eastern royal family on a high-stakes matter, because Alistair believed that doing was a better teacher than watching.

These weren’t isolated acts. They were his philosophy. He believed deeply in investing in people, in raising others up, in giving more than he took. The long list of lawyers who credit their success to his mentorship is perhaps his greatest professional legacy.

“Alistair had a gift, an ability to attract people who simply wanted to be around him,” recalls our partner Jeff Golub. “When you combined that with his legal skills and work ethic, it was a very special mix, and people naturally gravitated toward him. No matter how senior he became at the firm, he never lost sight of making it a better place for everyone — from partners to the youngest associates. He had endless energy for mentoring and for giving young lawyers opportunities.”

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From left: Partners Alex B. Roberts, Owen J. McGovern, David J. Beck, Alistair B. Dawson, associate Maryam Ghaffar, partner Jeff M. Golub, of counsel Seepan V. Parseghian and partner Russell S. Post, who is the current head of the executive committee which Alistair headed up the prior two years.

Shaping the Culture of the Legal Community

Alistair's fingerprints are everywhere on the culture of Beck Redden and the wider Texas legal community. As one colleague noted, when describing our highest values to prospective hires, it is Alistair's words and example that come to mind. He reminded us, again and again, that we are members of a noble profession not just participants in a business. He lived that creed every day.

He was also remarkably adaptable. Even as a senior partner, he remained eager to listen and learn, to accept constructive feedback and to change his approach if it would better serve the next generation. Few leaders with his stature show that kind of humility. It made him not only respected but beloved.

In every committee meeting, in every lunchroom conversation, Alistair was a leader. He had strong opinions, and he voiced them. But he also listened, debated and engaged with others honestly. He made our firm stronger by never settling for easy answers.

Alistair's leadership extended beyond our walls. He gave tirelessly to the profession, serving the bar in countless ways.

But perhaps most moving was his work connecting bar service to causes deeply personal to him, particularly autism awareness and support for individuals with special needs.

Through his advocacy, countless families in our city and beyond found greater support, visibility and hope. He never sought credit; he sought impact. And he achieved it. His contributions to these causes will outlast all of us.

Our partner Marcos Rosales said, "I believe Alistair was more intentional and thoughtful about the future of our firm than anybody else. Because of his leadership in this area, we are a better place to work than we have ever been. Our attorneys are better positioned to succeed, and we are better prepared to move into our next 30 years."

The Friend We Knew

For all his professional accomplishments, those of us who knew Alistair personally will remember his humanity most. His door was always open. His advice was always candid and kind. His humor — sometimes dry, sometimes boisterous — could cut through the tensest day.

He loved bringing people together. Nowhere was that more evident than in the annual Dawson Cup, the golf tournament he hosted each December. What began as a friendly outing became a beloved institution, drawing judges, lawyers and friends from across the community. It was Alistair at his best: competitive, convivial and always seeking to strengthen the bonds that tie us together.

Those who played golf with him knew not only his love for the game but, more importantly, his love for the camaraderie it created. He built networks — not for self-promotion but for genuine connection.

If I were to distill Alistair into a few words, they would be these: loyal, generous and passionate. Loyal to his clients, his colleagues, his friends and his family. Generous with his time, his wisdom, his opportunities and his laughter. Passionate about the law, about justice, about making

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the world better in ways large and small.

He was, as one colleague said, the “Roy Kent” of the bar — ubiquitous, forceful and beloved (Ted Lasso fans will understand). He was also, in the truest sense, a lawyer’s lawyer: someone who cherished the profession, who carried its traditions with pride and who inspired others to do the same.

As our partner Jacqueline Furlow recalls, “Alistair was a force for good in every facet of his life. He abounded in love, joy and vitality — for his family and friends, for the practice of law and for serving those in need. His bigheartedness and astute wisdom set him apart as a trusted counselor, mentor and friend. He will leave a lasting legacy for our firm and all who knew him of the powerful impact of living every day with intentionality, positivity and selflessness.”

We at Beck Redden will feel his absence every day. His chair in the conference room, his voice in debate, his laughter echoing down the hallway — all are gone too soon. But his legacy remains. It remains in the partners he mentored, the clients he served, the causes he championed and the community he strengthened.

A Lasting Legacy

When future generations ask what made Beck Redden the firm it is, they will hear stories of Alistair Dawson. Stories of a young lawyer trusted to lead cases of enormous consequence. Stories of a mentor who gave others the gift of opportunity. Stories of a leader who shaped the culture of a firm by insisting that it honor the nobility of the law. Stories of a friend who loved golf and card games, who loved people and who loved the life he built through law.

We mourn Alistair’s passing, but we also celebrate his life. He gave more than he took. He lived fully, served faithfully and inspired deeply. And though we will never again see him stride into court or walk into our offices, his influence will endure — in our firm, in our profession and in the lives of all who had the privilege to know him.

Rest in peace, Alistair. We are grateful for your friendship, your leadership and your example. You will be missed but never forgotten.