



Lee Bounds: Faculty Member and Public Servant

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[Lee Bounds died a week ago at age 97](#). He was a remarkable person, and so it is not surprising that [the News & Observer noted his passing with an editorial about his life as a public servant](#). For our purposes it is especially worth remembering Lee because he was a faculty member at the Institute of Government from 1952 to 1965. He was long gone when I arrived in 1978, but I learned about Lee's work and was lucky enough to know him.

After serving as Secretary of Correction from 1965 until 1973, Lee returned to the University as a Kenan Professor to lead the undergraduate Administration of Justice Program—which was not connected to the Institute. As a new faculty member working in the criminal law field, he invited me to teach a survey course for undergraduates about the criminal justice system. It was a wonderful learning experience for me and I thoroughly enjoyed it. Ellie Kinnaird, who later became a state senator, was one of my students.

Governor Martin asked Lee to serve again as Secretary of Correction in the early 90s after the department was criticized over some questionable contracting practices. It was an ethics crisis. He had served as Secretary of Correction under Republican and Democratic governors, and Lee had a national reputation as an innovator in corrections practices. Governor Martin called on Lee to serve again because he also had a reputation for unquestioned integrity. He was decisive and got things done, and he was trusted and respected by everyone—regardless of their ideology or partisan affiliation. Lee's one condition for accepting Governor Martin's appointment as Secretary was simple—an attorney from the Institute's faculty would be appointed to serve as his legal counsel in the department. Tom Thornburg took a one-year leave of absence and filled that role, which met Lee's interests and was a wonderful learning experience for Tom.



Lee was a visionary. I heard stories about his ideas for the Institute of Government from Henry Lewis, a former colleague and later the Director of the Institute. Lee apparently envisioned that the Institute would become the training center for all North Carolina law enforcement and corrections officials. There was spirited debate among the faculty about that idea, and ultimately it was decided that attempting to provide basic and continuing training for thousands of local and state law enforcement officials would tilt the Institute's focus too much toward criminal justice. I'm sure there were arguments about "the tail wagging the dog," which have occurred at various times in our history. Losing that argument evidently was one reason Lee decided to leave in 1965 and serve as Secretary of Correction. As one illustration of Lee's vision, I remember Henry Lewis telling me that Lee had advocated for including a landing pad for helicopters in the original plans for the Knapp Building.



Lee embodied our strongly held value about non-partisanship as a faculty member. He was able to serve governors from different political parties, and to be effective in working with the legislature,



because people completely trusted that he was nonpartisan. That trust came partly because he had been an Institute faculty member who lived the value of non-partisanship as a part of a strong culture that continues today.

It also has not been unusual for faculty members to leave the Institute for positions in government, though it has happened less often in recent years. In addition to Tom's experience with Lee Bounds, Jim Drennan took a one-year leave of absence to serve as Director of the Administrative Office of the Courts, and Jack Vogt worked for an extended period in the Wake County Budget Office. Norma Houston took a leave of absence to work for Erskine Bowles when he became UNC President. Other faculty members have had similar experiences of varying duration. I'm convinced that they came back with broadened perspectives that made them better faculty members.

There may be pressures that make it harder to arrange similar experiences today, or that seem to make it harder. I hope we can find ways to free up faculty time for more of these kinds of experiences for folks who may be interested. Kara Millonzi's strategic foresight subcommittee is working on issues around freeing faculty from unnecessary administrative duties, which could create more time for faculty to explore these kinds of special assignments, or to focus on other faculty priorities.