He has said it was the hardest professional decision he has made in his life. When you look hard at what he had to choose between, you have to believe it’s true.

When Marty Meehan accepted the offer to be the next chancellor of UMass Lowell—a post he will assume officially July 1—he was a core member of a newly elected majority in the U.S. House of Representatives. He was co-author of one of the most heralded pieces of campaign-reform legislation in decades and the first member of Congress to call publicly for an exit strategy in Iraq. He was a senior member of his party, a key member of several committees, a genuine reformer who had earned respect in his district—where he ran unopposed last November—and on both sides of the congressional aisle. His star was rising in Washington. It would have risen higher still.

Yet he walked away from it all to be chancellor of his alma mater. That can’t have been an easy thing to do.

“Higher education is the foundation of this region. It will determine the region’s future. What we do now, today, at this university, will decide who will leave and who will stay. Now—there has never been a more critical time than now.”

—Marty Meehan

Speaker Tom Foley, and vote against PAC contributions—junior members have lost their seats for far less. It was a difficult thing, as early as 1994, to take a stand against Big Tobacco, proposing to prosecutors—years before the government’s move against tobacco compa-

ries—that they pursue perjury charges against industry heads. It was a difficult thing, seven years ago, to ally himself with a single House colleague (Connecticut Rep. Christopher Shays) to force a vote on campaign financing over the opposition of House leaders, who mustered every parliamentary maneuver on the books to block the bill—a bill that, four years later, after clearing the Senate under the sponsorship of Sens. John McCain and Russ Feingold, would be hailed as the first major piece of campaign-reform legislation in more than a generation. And it was a difficult thing, on his return from a fact-finding trip to Iraq in January 2005, to call publicly for a phased exit of our troops—two years before a bipartisan panel, the Iraq Study Group, would formally propose the same thing.

And now he has done another difficult thing. This one, he says, the toughest one yet. And you have to wonder—why?

Photo courtesy of the The Lowell Sun.

Meehan and State Rep. Steven Panagiotakos

At the invitation of incoming Chancellor Marty Meehan, U.S. Rep. John Lewis, D-Ga., described as “one of the most courageous persons the Civil Rights Movement ever produced,” delivered the UMass Lowell commencement address in June.

Yet he walked away from it all to be chancellor of his alma mater. That can’t have been an easy thing to do.

He has done a lot of difficult things. You could almost say that doing difficult things has been the defining theme of his career. It was a difficult thing in 1993, as a freshman House member, to reject the directions of his own party leader, House Speaker Tom Foley, and vote against PAC contributions—junior members have lost their seats for far less. It was a difficult thing, as early as 1994, to take a stand against Big Tobacco, proposing to prosecutors—years before the government’s move against tobacco compa-

ries—that they pursue perjury charges against industry heads. It was a difficult thing, seven years ago, to ally himself with a single House colleague (Connecticut Rep. Christopher Shays) to force a vote on campaign financing over the opposition of House leaders, who mustered every parliamentary maneuver on the books to block the bill—a bill that, four years later, after clearing the Senate under the sponsorship of Sens. John McCain and Russ Feingold, would be hailed as the first major piece of campaign-reform legislation in more than a generation. And it was a difficult thing, on his return from a fact-finding trip to Iraq in January 2005, to call publicly for a phased exit of our troops—two years before a bipartisan panel, the Iraq Study Group, would formally propose the same thing.

And now he has done another difficult thing. This one, he says, the toughest one yet. And you have to wonder—why?
sheer enormity of what he’s given up to take this job. What gives it weight is the life story he brings with him to the chancellor’s office: 50 years of history in the region, a 30-year relationship with the University—as student, adjunct professor, champion in Congress—and a passion for education that has been reflected time and time again.

“This place gave me a chance when there weren’t a lot of other opportunities,” he explained when asked why he had accepted the job. “I feel passionately about this University. Fundamentally, I can tell you it gave me the basis to do whatever I’ve been able to do with my life.”

It is this awareness that he carries with him, this gratitude for the blessings of an education—at UMass Lowell as well as at Suffolk University, where he earned his law degree—that both reflect his working-class humanity and offer the best hope the University has as it moves forward.

Christopher R. Anderson, president of the House of Representatives of the Massachusetts House of Representatives, said, “He has the skills and experience to be an exemplary chancellor for UMass Lowell. Massachusetts needs a world-class UMAlum to help the state compete in the global economy.”

Christopher R. Anderson, president of the Massachusetts High Technology Council

"I believe the University is on the verge of greatness.”


“The University needs a leader who can bring to the campus the most talented students in their disciplines, as well as substantial additional resources to strengthen programs and facilities,” Meehan has said. “In addition…the next chancellor must be a skilled manager and a strategic marketer with prolific fund-raising ability and a compelling vision.”

His management skills have been proven over 14 years in office and seven successful election campaigns. As a manager, he has assembled the votes time and again to turn minorities to majorities. His fund-raising skills are the envy of Congress. As for his vision, he puts it very simply: “I believe the University is on the verge of greatness.”

There is an alumnus and former chancellor who wants to take it there.