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A Tribute to John D. Feerick

Cover Page Footnote

Chief Judge of the State of New York; Chief Judge of the Court of Appeals of the State of New York.

A TRIBUTE TO JOHN D. FEERICK

*Judith S. Kaye**

When John Feerick was first told that he had been chosen to receive the New York State Bar Association's Gold Medal, its highest honor, he responded, "Why me?" Neither the selection nor the response came as a surprise to the Dean's multitude of friends and admirers, which includes me. Knowing John as I do, I imagine he will feel much the same about the dedication of an entire issue of the *Law Review* as he did about the award of the Gold Medal.

Why him? No one more than John Feerick deserves the resounding applause of the Bar, the Law School, and the Chief Judge.

Starting with the Bar, John is one of those rare individuals who both defines and embodies the very best of our profession. He loves the law, and has perfected its practice. After a stellar student record at Fordham, he spent his *first* twenty-year stint at the Bar with Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom, developing that distinguished firm's labor and employment law practice. During his *second* twenty-year stint, while Dean of the Law School, he added a breathtaking record of service to the profession and service to the public. He was a fabulous President of the Association of the Bar of the City of New York. In addition, there just can't be a single good government group, or reform-oriented task force, working group, committee or commission that he hasn't chaired or assisted. He is Public Citizen Number One. He is One of a Kind.

The point is that, when it comes to service to the Bar and service to the public, Lawyer John has always found ways—and ways have always found him—to help those in need, to give back to the community, to make this a better profession and a fairer, more just society. He is the standard bearer by which we would wish to have the public judge us as a profession, and therefore is appropriately honored not just with the Gold Medal but with all of the Bar's highest commendations.

Then there's the Law School. Surely no one more than John Feerick deserves the hearty applause of this Law School, which has for the past two decades been the core of his professional life. The Law School is by now thoroughly imbued with his spirit and

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commitment—his five “H’s” of lawyering: hard work, honesty, harmony, helping others and higher purpose. Imagine a generation of lawyers inculcated with these values! Many times I have had the pleasure of seeing the open admiration of students—faculty and alumni, too—for their remarkable Dean.

During one Commencement, I saw him come onto the stage of Avery Fisher Hall carrying a folder bulging with tiny boxes, which he told me contained his small, private gifts to students who had done something special in the public interest. At the end of the evening, without any fanfare, the folder was empty. For twenty years, Dean Feerick has been bestowing his own personal gifts—those are boundless and inexhaustible—on the Law School and its students in every imaginable way, securing both the reputation of this first-rate institution and the highest professional values of the fortunate individuals who pass through its doors.

Finally, John Feerick has surely earned the applause of the Chief Judge. Indeed, after years of shamelessly calling on him time and again for help, I am delighted at last to have this opportunity to express publicly the gratitude of the New York State courts for his valued assistance. By now it is clear to Dean Feerick, and to all the world, that he is my first thought for every new initiative to improve the administration of the courts. Just a few recent examples are his service on the Committee to Promote Public Trust and Confidence in the Courts, the Committee to Review Audiovisual Coverage of Court Proceedings (which he chaired), the Continuing Legal Education Committee and the Judicial Salary Commission.

When the State-Federal Council and the *Law Review* concocted the idea of a seminar on issues of mutual interest to State and Federal courts, there was no need to call ahead to seek the Dean’s permission, or approval, for siting the event at the Law School. The red carpet was out for us, as we knew it would be. We know that we can consider the Law School home for a wide variety of endeavors to improve the profession and to improve the law.

Why him? Why do so many people count on the Dean for advice and assistance? The answer is simple. John Feerick’s through-and-through genuineness, kindness, wisdom, scholarliness, sincerity, humility, energy and integrity—and I could go on—assure the success of every single one of his many undertakings. We are never disappointed. John’s work is never about *him*. Always it’s about the task at hand.

I first learned of the Dean’s decision to conclude his tenure when I read his statement delivered to the faculty on November 2. The pages tingled with emotion—I’m glad I wasn’t there to hear it in person. What eased the impact for me was the glimpse the Dean gave us of his *third* twenty-year stint at the Bar. More time for Emalie, their six children and eight grandsons (wow!)—surely most deserved all

around. Teaching, writing, and greater—yes, *greater*—service to the community and the profession.

The only imaginable conclusion for a writing about John Feerick is an expression of thanks—that he has chosen to dedicate his prodigious talents to all of us—and the hope that each of his upcoming twenty-year stints will leave him as fulfilled and vigorous as the one just ended.

Notes & Observations