I wish I could say something witty and unique, but those of you who know me know that I’m not very witty, and that I haven’t had an original idea in 20 years. So, I’ll try to compensate by keeping this blessedly short.

First, some thank you’s, and then I’d like to talk for four minutes about government service.

First of all, thank you. But you know, everything comes at a price, including awards like these; and unfairly, the recipient of the award is rarely the one who pays the price for it. So my wife, Linda, who after 31 years still tolerates me, sees the flip side of the work that resulted in this award: While she paints and wallpapers, gardens, mows, shovels the snow, rakes the leaves, takes the cars to the mechanic, hires and fires all the contractors, unstops the toilets, everything around the house, I do -- nothing. If I dropped dead tomorrow, it would be a month before someone at home said: say, where’s that guy who used to come around here sometimes? Linda, thank you.

And Joe Agne, my minister, who has tried to help me understand what it all means, to push me forward on this journey, and in particular who has given me the opportunity to preach and teach. And who reminds me how blessed I am that my job is my mission, something rarely possible in the private sector. Joe.

And friends, like Beth Gluck, who is here.

And the members of the Municipal Law Section, who I suspect pushed hard for this award, and many of whom are here tonight, some from far away, like Linda Kingsley of Rochester, Jennifer Siegel, Steve Leventhal. If anyone here is involved in municipal law and not a member of the Section, you should join, not just for the professional benefits and access to extraordinary expertise but because this is a great bunch of people.
And members of the executive committee of the Commercial & Federal Litigation Section. I’m sorry I can’t mention everyone.

Of course, what makes this kind of government work possible is those who stand behind it. Government is often the stepchild of our profession and even of this Association. Madame President, I look forward to reduced dues for government attorneys and to a full-time public servant serving as President of the Association.

In the City, we are blessed with the likes of Mayor Bloomberg and Speaker Quinn, who really believe in government ethics and stand behind it. And people who are here tonight, like Anthony Crowell, Counselor to the Mayor; Norma Abbene, Deputy Counsel to the Mayor; and Andrea Berger, our agency’s incredibly gifted lawyer at the Law Dept. Unless the people at the top support ethics, it will not happen.

Chairs of ethics boards with which I have served, like John Feerick and Henry Miller. And our current chair at the Conflicts Board, Steve Rosenfeld of Paul Weiss, who pays an enormous amount of attention to us but never micromanages. And our Board members, like Manana Freyre and Andy Irving, and our former Board member Shirley Siegel (one of the great figures in the breakthrough of women into our profession) who are here tonight and who must put in the serious, hard work that government ethics requires.

But most of all our staff at the Board. This is my 10th job out of law school – Wall Street law firm, full time law professor, state government, small suburban firm, the whole deal. But hands down the best staff I have ever seen is our staff at the COIB.

Talk about dropping dead tomorrow, it would be six months before our staff realized I was gone, not because I’m so bad but because they’re so good. Our tiny agency has a staff of only 21, with jurisdiction over 325,000 public servants. But last year our two trainers taught over 400 ethics classes, for more than 15,000 officials. Last year our attorneys answered 3,300 telephone calls asking for ethics advice and issued over 600 written opinions. They disposed of over 420 enforcement cases, 61 public dispositions, some of those involving full trials on the merits, with 54 fines. The tiny financial disclosure unit implemented an enormously complex (and
problem plagued) electronic disclosure system for 8,000 City officials, responding to thousands of questions and complaints. Administration and IT never failed us.

Thanks to them, the COIB is one of the best ethics agencies in the world. That’s why we were chosen by the federal government to provide the municipal responses to the Council of Europe’s anti-corruption audit of the United States. That’s why we’ve been visited by representatives from over a quarter of the nations of the world. That’s why the government of Egypt has asked us to consult with them on a major government ethics initiative they’re implementing this spring in Cairo, using the Conflicts of Interest Board as a model, and asked our Director of Training and Education to travel to Egypt in March to train hundreds of high-level Egyptian officials (not at City expense, I would note). Is it any wonder I got this award? Not because of me, because of them.

In many ways, government, at least New York City government, functions better and more efficiently than the private sector. After leaving City service, former Mayor Giuliani set up a firm to export to the private sector innovations developed by the City, like Comstat. And in the area of transparency and ethics, government, at least New York City, is far cleaner than the private sector. If you try in the City some of the practices common to private companies, our Board will string you up by your thumbs. All that is why I am proud to be an employee of the City of New York.

And finally, I tell my students about the polls and studies showing that a lot of lawyers are unhappy with their careers. But I don’t see that in government. Some of you have probably seen the new ABA study “Pulse of the Legal Profession”:

“This Pulse study found that public sector lawyers are more likely to find the practice of law intellectually stimulating (89%), express pride in being an attorney (88%), feel like they are contributing to the greater good (87%), feel valued by their organization…and express satisfaction with their work/life balance….Public sector lawyers report the highest levels of career satisfaction…, are most likely to say they would recommend a legal career to a young person…and are the most likely segment to say they will be practicing law in five years (85%).”
So to those of you in the private sector, hey, I’m sorry. Maybe some
day, you, too, will get a chance to serve in the public service.

This award is a great honor, and it means a lot to me. Thank you.