



NEW YORK CITY LAW DEPARTMENT
OFFICE OF THE CORPORATION COUNSEL

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Speeches

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**ON EVE OF RETIREMENT, LEGAL LEGEND JEFF FRIEDLANDER
DELIVERS REMARKS AT CITY HALL**

***“REFLECTION AND GRATITUDE” PERMEATE SPEECH GIVEN AT JUNE 3, 2015, CELEBRATION
COMMEMORATING FRIEDLANDER’S FORTY-FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC SERVICE CAREER***

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Nearly a decade ago, when I had been at the Law Department a mere thirty-five years, Michael Cardozo and my colleagues kindly organized a festive reception in this very space to commemorate my tenure.

In the intervening years, we’ve all grown a bit older, but this space has grown much more beautiful.

Since that day, this chamber, including much of City Hall, has undergone a thorough and meticulous restoration. If you are not a habitu  of City Hall, and even if you are, please take the time to look around and admire this magnificent building.

And for making this chamber and City Hall available this evening, my heartfelt thanks to Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito and Mayor Bill de Blasio.

Forty-four years, thirteen Corporation Counsels, seven mayors, friends, colleagues, clients, adversaries, negotiating partners, the warm presence of so many of you here today – for me this is a time of reflection and a time of gratitude.

Reflection only just beginning.

Gratitude overflowing.

As some of you know, I didn’t set out to pursue a career at the New York City Law Department or even in public service. As a student at New York University Law School, I was only vaguely aware of the Corporation Counsel’s office and found myself here only because I was recruited by Norman Redlich, then my professor and soon-to-be First Assistant Corporation Counsel and later the Corporation Counsel.

I am ever so grateful to Norman, because I have been blessed to have a career where I could indulge, for forty-four years, my love of the City of New York and my love of law.

I am grateful for the opportunity to work with an illustrious succession of the City’s mayors, beginning with John Lindsay and Abe Beame.

I got to know and work with Mayor David Dinkins when he was City Clerk and when he was Borough President of Manhattan and a member of the Board of Estimate. Through his pioneering mayoralty to his current perch as a

professor at Columbia University, David Dinkins's civic leadership has enriched the life of our City and expanded opportunities for inclusion of all New Yorkers in our civic life. To David Dinkins, friend and mentor, I am and shall always be grateful.

New Yorkers, and indeed the whole nation, owe an everlasting debt of gratitude for the leadership of Mayor Rudolph Giuliani in the days and months following the Sept. 11th terrorist assault on the heart of our City. In those days of mourning and fear, the Mayor's courage and resolution, with not a single wrong or misplaced word or gesture, calmed and reassured us all. To Mayor Giuliani, I am grateful.

The task of rebuilding fell to Mayor Michael Bloomberg, a true visionary whose eyes were, and are, on building a sustainable future. For the opportunity to play a part in the fight against guns, the promotion of public health, the opening of our waterfront to spectacular new parks and so very much more, I am truly grateful.

And I am grateful to have participated in the opening chapter of Mayor Bill de Blasio's Administration and the notable legislative successes achieved so early in the Mayor's tenure.

No, I am not omitting tribute to Mayor Edward Koch. Never. Like a number of my contemporaries who have gone on to leadership in the Law Department, I came into my own in the Koch Administration. If New Yorkers were asked to name the exemplary public servant of our time, the likely choice would be Ed Koch. The quintessential New Yorker, larger than life, his Administration produced a generation of leaders in the life of our City, in government, business, finance, journalism, non-profits, and cultural institutions alike. A cohesive group loyal to his memory and ever striving to fulfill his ideals, Koch Administration alums have served at the heart of every subsequent administration to this day. To Mayor Koch, all New York is grateful.

And I am grateful to the cavalcade of Corporation Counsels, who over the years have contributed so much to my professional and personal growth.

Beginning with J. Lee Rankin, Norman Redlich and Adrian Burke, Rankin interviewed me for the job. He flattered me and said I was just what the Law Department was looking for, and he would be glad to have me join up. But then said, and I remember this clearly: "You know, your classmates will be working for law firms and earning much more money. Are you really sure you want to do this?" Not great salesmanship, but apparently I did want to do this.

Endearing and irascible Bernie Richland truly loved the City and the Law Department. His fondest dream was someday to become Corporation Counsel. He finally got his chance, only to run headlong into the fiscal crisis, which devastated the Law Department. At the close of his tenure, he wrote to the budget director pleading simply, "Help!"

Help came with his successor, Allen G. Schwartz, who – with the unstinting support of his friend and former law partner Mayor Ed Koch – rebuilt the Department, in part by placing his faith in a group of young lawyers whom he appointed to key positions: Len Koerner, Paul Rephen, Joe Bruno, the late Steve Kramer among them, and also a not-yet thirty-year old Jeff Friedlander whom he appointed to head what is now the Legal Counsel Division.

Allen quickly established this office as the non-political, professional institution it has remained; his reforms define the office to this day, and if it were not for Allen, it is unlikely that many of us would have spent our careers serving the City.

Fritz Schwarz. A true champion of liberty and a national asset. Before serving as Corporation Counsel, he had already been counsel to Senator Frank Church's committee that investigated intelligence abuses following Watergate. Among the highlights of my career was my work with Fritz on anti-apartheid legislation, the gay rights bill, and opening private clubs to women.

Peter Zimroth masterminded New York City's successful system of public campaign financing – a model for the state and nation if only there were the political will to adopt it.

Victor Kovner and Peter Sherwood shared and furthered Mayor Dinkins' vision of the City as a "gorgeous mosaic."

Mayor Giuliani's first Corporation Counsel, Paul Crotty – Judge Crotty of the Southern District – graced the office with deep knowledge of City government gleaned from his service as both Finance Commissioner and Housing Commissioner for Ed Koch. Following a few months during which I acted as Corporation Counsel (which the City somehow managed to survive), Michael Hess took office and led us in the period following 9/11 when the Law Department was displaced and forced to conduct its business from forty-four separate locations.

And then, Michael Cardozo ... and Michael Cardozo ... and Michael Cardozo. The longest-serving Corporation Counsel. Twelve remarkable years during which we shared the adventure of defending and helping to implement the many initiatives of Michael Bloomberg's three terms in office. Michael Cardozo is the very definition of leader of the Bar, who has given so much to the legal profession and the City.

And now Zach Carter – criminal court judge, federal magistrate, U.S. Attorney – mentor to our new Attorney General Loretta Lynch. How could Mayor de Blasio possibly have chosen a wiser and more able legal advocate and advisor?

So, I've kept pretty good company over the years. And for that, I am grateful.

Now for just a bit of reflection on a professional lifetime's service to one institution, the City of New York.

It is one of the great failings of our time that trust in our institutions has declined markedly, and that in the case of so many of our bedrock institutions, this diminution of trust is, unfortunately, justifiable – deadlock in Congress, corruption in the State Legislature, financial malfeasance, soccer.

But what of New York City?

To paraphrase Ed Koch, "How are we doing?"

Taking the long view, it is my conclusion that New York City works.

I'd like to consider, briefly, three reasons why this is so.

First, New York City works because it has to.

This City is where the metaphorical, the symbolic, and the abstract become concrete.

People speak of putting out fires, but New York City firefighters put out fires.

We argue over education policy -- No Child Left Behind, Common Core – but in New York City we build school houses, we have classrooms in those buildings, and in those classrooms, teachers and children we have the responsibility to educate.

We debate infrastructure investment and transportation policy, but the bridges have to be repaired and the subways run.

We pick up and dispose of garbage, provide some of the best drinking water in the world.

Public safety, housing, economic development, zoning, social services.

New York City has to deliver.

Second, New York City works because it has adapted to change.

I recall Fritz Schwarz's fondness for the quote from *As You Like It*: "Sweet are the uses of adversity."

The fiscal crisis ultimately brought forth what are now the soundest budgetary and borrowing procedures and the highest possible bond rating.

The scandals in the late '80's led to ethical reforms, greater financial disclosure, investigatory oversight, and campaign finance reform.

The devastation wrought by Superstorm Sandy made us aware of needed regulatory changes to address sustainability in the face of climate change.

And finally, New York City works because of the talent and dedication of the people who serve it.

Beginning with the City's elected officials. The Mayors, of course. Leaders of the City Council like Peter Vallone. Borough Presidents like Manhattan's Gail Brewer and former Queens Borough President Claire Schulman.

Civic leaders who have come to the City's aid when called upon, like John Zucotti and Richard Ravitch.

Deputy Mayors like Nat Leventhal, Stan Brezenoff, Peter Powers, Marc Shaw, Dan Doctoroff, Tony Shorris.

And so many Commissioners responsible for delivering services to their fellow New Yorkers.

But our greatest strength lies in our deep bench of long-term public servants, who -- from administration to administration -- continue to provide disinterested leadership, knowledge, and expertise. The bureaucracy, if you will. Not a dirty word.

You see this exemplified in the Law Department, but not only there.

Mark Page and Stu Klein at the Office of Management and Budget.

David Karnovsky at City Planning.

Agency counsel like Phil Damashek and Susan Rogerson Pondish at the Department of Transportation; Matt Shafit at Housing and Preservation Development; Alessandro Olivieri at the Parks Department; and Bob Orlin at the Department of Sanitation.

Gary Altman and Rob Newman at the City Council.

Marjorie Landa, now with the Comptroller, and Edna Wells Handy at the Police Department.

Just a few names, emblematic of so many.

And let us pause to remember a great public servant and friend, Kathleen Grimm, Deputy Chancellor of the Department of Education, who died in February.

So many of my colleagues at the Law Department, I cannot even begin to call out. We have 730 lawyers and 630 support professionals. But let me pay tribute to three:

Susan Haddad, my Executive Assistant, has kept me afloat for the past sixteen years. Susan, thank you for everything.

Len Koerner, one of the great appellate lawyers of our time, who arrived at the Law Department three years before I did, and soldiers on.

And Georgia Pestana, who I am so happy will be my successor as First Assistant Corporation Counsel. Georgia: good luck.

Before I close, you will not escape my recitation of Mayor Koch's famous adage on public service, one that I have quoted on more than a few occasions:

- "Public service, when done honestly and done well, is the noblest of callings."

This formulation captures well the notions of sacrifices by public servants and benefits to the public we serve.

But my experience and the rewards of my Law Department career prompt me to add a corollary to Ed Koch's well-formulated proposition. This, too, I recite not for the first time. With all due modesty, I call it the "Friedlander Corollary," and I think many in this room, looking at their own experiences, will concur:

- "For the public servant herself or himself, public service is a gift. It is a gift that when received gratefully and accepted fully can be a lifetime's project."

This it has been for me, and for this, I give you my thanks.

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