



NEW YORK CITY LAW DEPARTMENT  
OFFICE OF THE CORPORATION COUNSEL

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Speeches

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*For Immediate Release*

**CORPORATION COUNSEL MICHAEL A. CARDOZO CHAMPIONS MAYOR'S  
COMMITMENT TO JUDICIAL PAY RAISES IN "LAW DAY" ADDRESS**

***SPEECH GIVEN BY MICHAEL A. CARDOZO TO JUDGES AND OTHER OFFICIALS  
AT NEW YORK COUNTY SUPREME COURT ON MAY 1, 2007***

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"On behalf of Mayor [Michael R.] Bloomberg, it's my pleasure to join you at this Law Day celebration. The Mayor has asked me to deliver a very specific message: As Albany finally considers judicial reform, he will do everything he can to bring about well-deserved, much-needed and substantial judicial pay raises.

"Whenever I appear before judges or juries, I always try to make a favorable impression in my opening statement ... but that was too easy.

"All kidding aside, judicial pay is a serious problem that needs to be corrected immediately. Albany's failure to enact judicial pay increases is an absolute disgrace; it is a frontal attack on the rights of every citizen in this state because, to put it bluntly, it is an assault on the rule of law and the independence of judges who administer that law.

"The Governor and the Legislature should be ashamed of themselves for being unable to reach agreement on this vital issue. Your salaries should not be held hostage to differences between the Legislature and the Governor over legislative salaries and campaign finance reform. You have a right to a substantial salary increase – and you deserve that increase now.

"The Mayor and I firmly believe that we must maintain a highly qualified and independent judiciary to uphold the rule of law in this city, this state and this nation. Last Friday, the Mayor highlighted his ongoing commitment to this effort by hosting his Annual Law Day breakfast with a number of judges, with whom he discussed various critical issues facing the judiciary and the City. Then Friday afternoon, he spent two hours interviewing candidates, nominated to him by his Independent Judicial Screening Committee, for appointment to the New York City courts.

"To attract highly qualified judicial candidates and to maintain an independent judiciary, an essential first step is to ensure that judicial salaries are competitive with – if not higher than – salaries paid to federal judges. The game Albany is playing with your salaries in order to achieve other political goals is one of Russian roulette. The game can have deadly consequences as citizens who depend on the law realize that fair judges may not be there to administer justice. This lethal game must stop. Albany must enact your pay raise now.

"Other steps must also be taken. The Mayor has always believed in merit appointment of judges, which is why he spends significant time on this issue. Encouragingly, last week Gov. [Eliot] Spitzer also proposed a series of judicial reforms including restructuring the judicial selection process to effect merit "selection, as well as streamlining the court system through trial court merger.

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“We will be working with the Governor, the Legislature and [New York State Court of Appeals] Chief Judge [Judith] Kaye to have these long-needed and critical measures enacted as amendments to the State Constitution. And we will also be working with them on an interim legislative solution to the selection process. Together, I hope we can come up with a nominating system for the State Supreme Court that is far superior to the existing one – which, as many of you know all too well, couldn’t be much worse.

“Judicial independence – including fairly paying judges who have been selected on the basis of quality not politics – is key to the rule of law. When our City faces difficult legal issues, the Mayor is always very clear: We should make our best case in court and then accept the courts’ rulings. Sometimes some of you decide cases against the City and, in my role as an advocate for the City, I may disagree with you. But we respect your decisions. Respect for the law is the foundation of American society ... and that means you are the guardians of that critical foundation.

On the Mayor’s behalf, thank you for the enormously important public service you perform for our City. And in the days and weeks ahead, working with the State, I am hopeful that we will begin to make important improvements to the judicial system. New Yorkers deserve it, and you deserve it.”

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