

Sabrina G. Comizzoli

Remarks for Hollenbeck Award

Thank you to the New Jersey Commission on Professionalism in the Law and to its Chair, Karol Corbin Walker. I truly appreciate that you have selected me to receive this award. Charles Hollenbeck, for whom this award is named, had a remarkable career in public service. It is no wonder that he is revered by so many members of our profession. Thank you also to my colleagues at the Association of the Federal Bar of New Jersey who nominated me. I am grateful for your many years of friendship and support.

There are many ways to serve the public in the legal profession. For example, one could represent individuals who cannot afford legal services; or work for a non-profit organization, a public defenders service, an educational institution, or a government agency; or, one might lobby for changes in the law.

I have pursued a career in government service at the New York State Attorney General's Office, at the Department of Justice in Washington, D.C., and at my "home" for 18 years, the U.S. Attorney's Office in Newark.

After the pride of earning a law degree, I wanted something real and permanent to believe in. That

something was equal justice under law and fairness in the criminal justice system. Over the years, I have derived much satisfaction in working towards this goal at the U.S. Attorney's Office. I have had the ability to perform highly meaningful work in a collegial environment, where we are all striving to achieve a common mission.

The rewarding nature of my work compels me to encourage more junior lawyers and law students to likewise pursue a career in government service.

Many wonder whether it is an affordable career choice. Government service is a financial sacrifice. Ideally, you may pursue a career that allows you to both serve the public and engage in private practice at different times. Also, people interested in pursuing public service should keep in mind that some public service jobs can offer other perks: such as loan forgiveness for law student loans; affordable health care benefits; or perhaps a more flexible work schedule, which could help reduce day care costs.

There are other challenges to government service, however, besides financial. Sometimes, there is the general feeling of under-appreciation, such as during a federal government shutdown when it seems like the public and our elected officials do not appreciate or understand the value of the services we provide in exchange for our salaries.

Another recent challenge has been an attack on the integrity of career prosecutors and investigative agents, who have for years done nothing more than pursue justice impartially under both Republican and Democratic administrations. These attacks have even come from the highest levels and are designed to undermine the public's perception of our integrity and independence. Beyond being offensive, they have caused growing angst among prosecutors who fear that we are losing the trust of the community we are supposed to serve.

What quality is it that helps public servants to keep going despite attempts to attack our integrity? It is professionalism.

Among the many ways to define professionalism, I suggest this: It is doing the right thing for the right reasons, every day. Public servants are servants of the public and of the nation. We are not servants to one man, nor are we masters of any other. We cannot allow attacks on prosecutorial integrity to discourage us. Instead, we must renew our determination to do our jobs well and with integrity.

Despite these challenges, it is still possible, indeed highly likely, that future lawyers would derive great satisfaction from using their legal skills in government service. I encourage more senior attorneys in public service and government service

to provide mentorship, support, and recruitment opportunities to ensure that the public is served by high quality lawyers with great integrity in the future.

To paraphrase political humorist Art Buchwald, I do not know if these are the best of times or the worst of times, but I know this: this is the only time we've got – and you can either sit on your derriere or go out and pick a daisy. (Hint: Art Buchwald did not say *derriere*.)

In conclusion, I dedicate this award to all of the daisy-pickers out there in government service. Thank you for your dedication. And thank you, again, to the New Jersey Commission on Professionalism in the Law for this tremendous honor.