

Portland Public Library

Portland Public Library Digital Commons

Maine News Index – Portland Press Herald

Maine News Index Online

11-23-1999

Ginsburg celebrates lawyering for public good

Joshua L. Weinstein

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.portlandlibrary.com/news_pph

Recommended Citation

Weinstein, Joshua L., "Ginsburg celebrates lawyering for public good" (1999). *Maine News Index – Portland Press Herald*. 15506.
https://digitalcommons.portlandlibrary.com/news_pph/15506

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Maine News Index Online at Portland Public Library Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Maine News Index – Portland Press Herald by an authorized administrator of Portland Public Library Digital Commons. For more information, please contact schechter@portlib.org.

guard will be posted occasionally at the court

But, in a change of policy, the Cumberland

Please see SECURITY, Page 3B

Please see SKET, Page 3B

Ginsburg celebrates lawyering for public good

● The Supreme Court justice delivers a lecture Monday night in Portland.

By JOSHUA L. WEINSTEIN
Staff Writer

Ruth Bader Ginsburg knows that lawyers aren't exactly beloved.

"Writers from Shakespeare to Sandburg have sometimes revealed a lingering distrust of the lawyers' trade," the associate justice of the United States Supreme Court said in Portland on Monday night. "But the legal profession has among its practitioners brave men and women who strive to change that perception, jurists devoted to, and at work for, the public good."

Delivering the University of Maine Law School's eighth annual Frank M.

*"Our system ...
works best when
opposing positions
are well-represented
and fully aired."*

Ruth Bader Ginsburg

Coffin Lecture on Law and Public Service, the justice applauded lawyers and organizations devoted to public service, and despaired that there are not more.

Addressing about 700 people at the State Street Church, Ginsburg praised Pine Tree Legal Assistance in Maine, which she said provides legal representation that improves poor people's lot and also has "fostered

improvement in prison conditions and in mental health care."

She also spoke warmly of the American Civil Liberties Union, which she said has acted "not simply to secure free speech in particular instances, but as front-runners in advancing for all people freedom of thought, expression and association, as well as the equal protection of the laws."

Ginsburg, a Columbia Law School graduate appointed to the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia by President Carter, and to the Supreme Court by President Clinton, also mentioned the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, which she said helped end apartheid in America.

"The NAACP and the ACLU," she said, "set a pattern for myriad other

Please see JUSTICE, Page 3B



Staff photo by Doug Jones

Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg thanks Judge Frank M. Coffin for his introduction Monday night before starting a lecture at the State Street Church in Portland.

JUSTICE

Continued from Page 1B

public interest legal organizations - for example, the Mexican-American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, the National Organization for Women Legal Defense and Education Fund, the National Women's Law Center and the National Partnership for Women and Families."

While she acknowledged that the people and organizations she named generally espouse liberal views, "the pro bono universe is not confined to the representation of poor persons, equal rights advocacy on behalf of racial minorities or women, free speech promotion or separation of church and state enforcement."

She said that a district attorney "who resists the lure of private practice, and instead pursues prosecutions vigorously but fairly, is also a pro bono lawyer, using his or her skills not just for personal gain, but for the good of the public."

And she said that conservative groups such as the Washington Legal Foundation, the Pacific Legal Foundation and the Mountain States Legal

Foundation are vital organizations.

"Competition can be a healthy thing in the pro bono sphere as elsewhere," she said. "Our system of justice works best when opposing positions are well-represented and fully aired. I therefore greet the expansion of responsible public-interest lawyering on the conservative side as something good for the system, and hardly a development to be deplored."

Yet, she said, there is too little public-interest lawyering going on.

"It is generally not ideology that keeps people from offering their services to poor clients," she said. "It is more likely to be apathy, selfishness, or anxiety that one is already overextended."

Ginsburg, who originally was scheduled to speak in September, but delayed the speech because of cancer surgery, said public service lawyering offers tremendous satisfactions, and quoted the Talmudic sage Rabbi Tarfon.

"The day is short," she quoted him. "And the task is much; the workers are lazy, but the reward is great."

Joshua L. Weinstein can be contacted at 791-6368 or at:

jweinstein@pressherald.com