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Remarks for Pro Bono Institute Reception
February 29, 2008

I am pleased once again to join the participants in the Pro Bono Institute's annual gathering. Although we are in the midst of a busy stretch of sittings at the Court, I could not miss this chance to applaud the good works of the Institute and its many supporters. Today's assemblage—the largest ever, I am told—is demonstrable evidence that the Institute has become a leading force for the public good and the betterment of the legal profession. The 2008 Seminar illustrates the extraordinary value of the Institute: it not only exhorts and inspires attorneys to public service; it also provides training, resources, and practical guidance to help translate inspiration into real help for those in need.

Law cannot rank as a true and learned profession if its practitioners are merely skilled artisans, performing their craft for hire. All who recognize that law is a public calling understand this: Members of the legal profession have an abiding obligation to ensure that people unable to pay for legal services can obtain, when needed, the assistance of well-trained lawyers to help them access the justice system.

The Institute honors this evening a group of lawyers who have done yeoman work to make the Institute's grand goal a practical reality. The recipient of the 2008 Zelon Pro Bono Award, the Legal Department of the Bank of America, serves

the public with an exemplary pro bono program. Under the leadership of Bank of America's General Counsel, Timothy Mayopoulos, the Department has made giant strides in a relatively short time. The Department launched its pro bono initiative in 2005 and became a charter signatory of the Institute's Pro Bono Challenge in 2006. Its members now contribute thousands of hours each year to such worthy causes as representation of Hurricane Katrina survivors, advocacy for children, and provision of legal services to the homeless, victims of domestic violence, and low-income entrepreneurs.

The Department's pro bono program is notable for its breadth and depth. During the last two years, more than 200 people on Bank of America's legal staff provided pro bono services in cities around the country and even abroad. These efforts are supported by the business leadership of the Bank, which sees pro bono work as an aspect of its broader commitment to corporate social responsibility. And by forming partnerships with law firms and public interest organizations, the Department has increased the ranks of jurists committed to public service while magnifying the effectiveness of its own efforts.

Timothy Mayopoulos himself exemplifies this commitment to pro bono work. In addition to leading the Department and overseeing its pro bono initiative, he serves on the Board of Directors of Appleaseed, a national network of public interest justice centers. I congratulate him and all of the members of his Department on tonight's award and on the diligent and caring work they have done to earn it.

Finally, I reserve my last words to speak in praise of the woman who has led the Institute with vision and tireless energy for more than a decade. Please join me in a rousing Brava for the Pro Bono Institute's President, Esther Lardent. We anticipate her Encores for many years to come.