

Lifetime Achievers

2005 *Our second annual awards to honor distinctive careers and public service.*

WE GET THE CALLS REGULARLY: How can my partner get chosen as a lifetime achiever? The answer is straightforward. We choose lawyers who have had great private practices and who have also made important contributions to public life. We didn't say

this was easy, just important. To narrow the field, we looked for lawyers who were still living but were near the end of their careers or had retired from their firms or principal jobs. And, as we did last year, we looked to the public sector to find examples of those who not only felt an irresistible calling but performed at the highest levels. We present this extraordinary group, most of whom, health permitting, continue to contribute to the private bar and the public good.

These are lawyers who gave meaning to the profession's values, lawyers whose careers are a challenge to those who follow.

—ARIC PRESS

JOHN GIBBONS

*Gibbons, Del Deo, Dolan
Griffinger & Vecchione*

DURING HIS DISTINGUISHED 20-YEAR tenure as a judge on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit, where he wrote more than 800 opinions, John Gibbons built up a stockpile of credibility. A Nixon appointee, he had a reputation as a liberal-leaning judge who was exceedingly fair. Since retiring from the bench, he hasn't let his name collect dust on his old decisions.



In 1990 Gibbons returned to Gibbons, Del Deo, Dolan, Griffinger & Vecchione, the firm he began his career with in 1950. Since then, he has founded a fellowship program that funds full-time associates to practice public interest and constitutional law and used his stature as a former judge to address some of the most controversial cases. His dedication to pro bono work has earned him the nickname as the firm's "acid rainmaker." "[My colleagues] don't mind a little acid rain," says Gibbons, who turned 80 in December.

Last spring, Gibbons took on the U.S. Department of Defense. In two landmark cases before the U.S. Supreme Court, Gibbons successfully argued that the U.S. government could not hold detainees indefinitely in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, without habeas corpus review. In his opening statement, Gibbons said that at stake was "the authority of the federal courts to uphold the rule of law," and warned that if left unchecked, the government's position would create "a lawless enclave insulating the executive branch from any judicial scrutiny now or in the future."

Such rhetoric might not have gone down as easily if it came from a political maverick. But Gibbons, a Republican who served in the Navy during World

War II, is anything but. That's why New York University School of Law professor Anthony Amsterdam, who also represented detainees, recommended that Gibbons handle the oral arguments.

Gibbons has also lent his voice to death penalty cases, famously calling capital punishment an "arbitrary imposition of revenge." And he has participated in groundbreaking cases. In 2000 Gibbons became the first lawyer to convince the Supreme Court to award relief on a habeas corpus petition based on ineffective assistance of counsel. Gibbons, who often pauses before answering questions, doesn't hesitate to say why he has devoted so much time to the issue.

"I have pretty good lawyer skills," he says. "It seems to me this is the kind of thing that a person with my skills ought to dedicate time to."

—ANDREW LONGSTRETH

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