

Public Lawyer of the Year Award

State Bar Convention

Anaheim, California

Chief Justice Ronald M. George

September 5, 2003

Good evening. Thank you for inviting me once again to take part in recognizing the recipient of the Public Law Section's Public Lawyer of the Year Award. I have, of course, spent my own legal career completely in public service, first as a Deputy Attorney General in the California Department of Justice for seven years, and after that 31 years as a member of the bench.

I began the practice of law with the view that public service would be a good way to match my intention to contribute to society with a desire to find intellectual interest and stimulation in my work. I have not been disappointed, and over the years, I have had the privilege of encountering numerous fellow practitioners who have selected the same path and also found it to be richly rewarding.

Public law practitioners may not often get the headlines of a flamboyant litigator or a fast-moving mergers-and-acquisitions specialist — but they provide the glue that ties our society together and ensures that the interests of the public are given due consideration. Public

lawyers, every day, have a major impact on policy in a wide range of areas. Each day, they face unique challenges, unprecedented issues, and competing pressures.

In my view, the opportunity to be at the cutting edge of so many important legal issues that affect the public is truly a privilege.

Whether in a local, county, state, or federal position, the public lawyer generally is shielded from the direct pressure of the bottom line that affects so many in private practice. This is not to say that the public lawyer is in a stress-free environment — far from it. But the public lawyer generally has the benefit of being expected to stay focused on public policy and

public interest, as well as the ability to invest the necessary time and effort to do so. Although public lawyering is not the highest ranking arm of our profession monetarily, for many it clearly is the most satisfying.

Today's honoree, Ariel Pierre Calonne, has made a career of public service and of contributing to the development of the law.

Since his graduation from Hastings College of the Law in 1983, he has devoted his talents to representing the diverse interests of a number of municipalities and other public entities in California. He began as an associate at Best, Best & Krieger, where he worked on issues involving drinking-water quality and water-

ratemaking, air quality matters, commercial development, and school fees, to name but a few.

He continued devoting his talents to matters of public consequence as an associate at Richards, Watson & Gershon, where he represented a number of Southern California municipalities in the capacity of City Attorney, or Assistant or Deputy City Attorney. Here again, the scope of the issues handled by Mr. Calonne reflects the significant and interesting areas of the law in which public lawyers may be engaged: among them were zoning, real estate, strategic planning and negotiation on major development proposals, CEQA, transit and

traffic mitigation, and public lawyer-client privilege.

Ten years ago, Mr. Calonne became City Attorney for Palo Alto, a full-service chartered city with a population of 60,000. He served as adviser to the city council, and general counsel to various city agencies (including those responsible for providing the complete municipal utility service for which Palo Alto is unique in California.) Among his many duties, he also represented the City before various administrative agencies, and provided advice and drafting and implementation assistance for development and redevelopment processes.

Nor did he confine his activities to his own local community. He served as President of the City Attorneys Department of the League of California Cities, and has helped develop and monitor the City Attorneys Department website, a 457-member resource available to every City Attorney in California. He has served on numerous task forces and committees at the state, county, and local level, and has shared his knowledge through his participation in a constant stream of seminars, programs, and papers.

His expertise in the Brown Act and the Public Records Act led to his service on the Advisory Committee to the Joint Senate-

Assembly Task Force on Personal Information and Privacy, and on the Electronic Access to Public Records Task Force convened by the Senate Select Committee on Information Services.

In short, Mr. Calonne has made his legal knowledge available to other public lawyers, thus ultimately benefiting the public at large.

The Public Lawyer of the Year Award is presented to a public law practitioner who is considered worthy of special note by his or her peers. Mr. Calonne's record of achievement demonstrates beyond question why he has been selected for this honor. The only negative note I feel compelled to sound on this otherwise

positive occasion is that in two days he will be taking his abundant knowledge and expertise outside of California to another venue when he becomes the City Attorney of Boulder, Colorado.

I am sure that in Colorado, he will continue his career of innovation, integrity, and public service — and still make California proud. If we are lucky, he will return to our state in the not-too-distant future and make further contributions to the practice of municipal law in California. We can only hope that this award will remind him of how much he and his work are valued by his peers in public service here in California.

Mr. Calonne, on behalf of the judicial system and all of us in public legal service in all three branches of government, I would like to extend my warmest congratulations to you on receiving this award.

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