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Tribute to John Pickering

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TRIBUTE TO JOHN PICKERING

*Timothy B. Dyk**

It is very appropriate that we are here today to honor John Pickering, who, for more than five decades, was a leading member of our bar. I first met John when I joined the small firm of Wilmer, Cutler & Pickering in 1964, two years after it was founded. The three founding fathers of the firm were formidable figures, particularly to a young lawyer, and John Pickering was no exception.

I do not mean that John was unkind. He was the kindest of people. But there was something particularly serious about him, and I always wondered whether that had to do with growing up in the prewar years. He had a demeanor that seemed to preclude coming to work in casual clothes or bantering during the work day or taking the associates out to a local watering spot after work. I remember that John's secretary was known as "Miss Blackney"; there was a formality even about John's secretary.

Those of us who were privileged to work with him were the recipients of a lasting gift. I had the privilege of receiving his guidance for over a quarter of a century. If others were responsible primarily for the firm's clients, John was responsible for the firm's conscience and for the training of its young lawyers. What he taught us was that law practice was a serious business, to be approached with seriousness and care and with daily attention to the highest ethical standards. Most importantly, John taught us that the judiciary was to be respected and that there was no higher obligation of a lawyer than to uphold the system of justice.

Although I have moved from one side of the podium to the other, I have not forgotten the lessons that I learned from John, and if I do my job well, or at least if I try to do it well, in large part I have John Pickering to thank.

* Judge, United States Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit.

