



**Nan Aron**  
**Alliance for Justice 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary luncheon**  
**June 3, 2009**

In 1979, we saw the writing on the wall. The right wing and the corporate special interests were gearing up to limit government, do away with regulations, and turn back the clock on social issues such as abortion and integration – and that was just the tip of the iceberg.

A group of organizations that cared about the environment, women's rights, civil rights, persons with disabilities, consumer protections, all came together to fight back. We pooled our talents and resources because united we could accomplish more than any of us could do alone. Now we have more than eighty member groups that represent almost six million people. By next year our goal is to have over a hundred.

For thirty years, all of us in this room have been leaders in the fight for justice. We have seen some incredible changes.

When Justice Souter resigned, Jay Leno joked, "A vacancy on the court! Let's just hope the President is better at picking a justice ... than the justices were at picking a president!" He got his wish.

When the president announced his choice, we already had lawyers from some of the city's top law firms researching the records of every possible nominee on the short list. I want to thank those lawyers – some of them are here today – from Covington & Burling, DLA Piper, Howrey, Patton & Boggs, and Steptoe & Johnson. You helped us — and the country — be ready on Day One.

That research confirmed everything we suspected about Sotomayor. What a breath of fresh air! She won't be like our Chief Justice.

Here's what Jeffery Toobin recently said about Roberts: "In every major case he has sided with the prosecution over the defendant, the state over the condemned, the executive branch over the legislative, and the corporate defendant over the individual plaintiff."

In Sonia Sotomayor we will have a justice who knows the Constitution was not written to favor the powerful but those who have no power.

She will not be the only judicial appointment from this president. There are hundreds ahead of us. But appointing judges is only part of the battle.

We cannot ignore what has happened since the year 2000 in the name of national security.

I agree with the person who once said, "If we forget what we did, we won't know who we are." That may be the only thing I like that Ronald Reagan ever said. But he was right.

When a hurricane strikes, you have to assess the damage before you rebuild. When you change lanes on 495, you need to look back in the rearview mirror.

As we rebuild our legal system, we have to look back to see how our nation's leaders could disregard the Constitution for eight terrible years. Habeas corpus ignored. Warrantless wiretaps. Torture.

There are those who say we should move on. Forget the past. They are wrong. This country values transparency and accountability. We need both — to restore America's standing in the world and our pride in our country.

We need an independent panel to investigate where America went wrong over the last decade, hold those who led us astray accountable, and recommend safeguards to prevent such a tragedy from ever happening again.

When the Senate rushed to confirm Judge Jay Bybee to the Ninth Circuit we stood alone in urging senators to oppose his nomination. The White House concealed his memos then, but now those memos are public. It is not too late to see how Judge Bybee and the other lawyers involved can — and should — be held responsible for their actions. And then we can look ahead.

Last year, some of our biggest successes came from helping advocates all across the country.

How do we do it? Let me tell you, we may be the only people in America who enjoy making tax law FUN!

Our staff has taken those complicated rules and brought them to life in workshops all over the country — training and advising thousands of nonprofits to be more effective advocates.

As busy nonprofits confront the incredible tangle of confusing, complex, contradictory, and just plain crazy morass that our lobbying and election rules have become our attorneys make sense of all that so you don't have to.

We will help foundations get the knowledge and skills to support advocacy. We will inspire students to pursue public interest work through our First Monday films. We will continue to harness the power of our member groups, allies and millions of activists.

A group of reformers came to see Franklin Delano Roosevelt to convince him to support them on a number of issues. FDR told them: "I agree with you. I want to do it. Now, make me do it."

Like FDR, Barack Obama can become a great president, but he cannot do it alone.

The pressures from the opposition are great. The radical right knows how to organize and will pick itself up. They will not let the churlish voice of Dick Cheney or the self-promoting hatred of Rush Limbaugh speak for the movement. The right will find smoother, more charming, speakers, but the message will be the same.

In 2006, when he was the junior senator from Illinois, Barack Obama appeared in our First Monday film, *Quiet Revolution*. He said "the remarkable thing about history is ordinary people doing extraordinary things." He mentioned having been to Rosa Parks' funeral, and said "we may surprise ourselves by how much influence we have just by speaking out."

I want to recognize some people who spent their lives speaking out but are no longer here to celebrate.

Ruth Goldman, lawyer, activist, passionate believer in the importance of appointing judges committed to justice for all. Two of her four children are here today, Debbie and Fran.

Clara Schiffer. A trailblazer in social justice and public health. A long-time mentor for women in the federal government, including her daughter Lois, who is here today.

My mother, Joan. I know her friends are here. You learned about Alliance for Justice from her – some of you willingly – some under duress. But you have spread the word about AFJ, and we are grateful for that.

Finally, we remember the courage of Dr. George Tiller, who provided abortion services at great personal risk over many years who was murdered on Sunday.

We honor their legacy by the work we do.

Now we look forward, as our next two guest speakers talk about what's ahead for America.

And then we go back to work and make the most of this moment in time.

So that 30 years from now, we can say that this was the time when people began to find fairness when they walk, scared and alone, into a courtroom... when people began to find more compassion and commitment to justice and equality in state capitols and the nation's capitol ... when those words made famous by Martin Luther King, and quoted by Barack Obama the night of his election rang true: "the arc of the moral universe is long ... but it bends towards justice."

Thank you very much.