INTRODUCTION TO CHIEF JUSTICE JEAN H. TOAL

Rosemary Queenan*

Good afternoon. It is my pleasure to introduce our next great chief, Chief Justice Jean H. Toal of the South Carolina Supreme Court.

Chief Justice Toal has been referred to as the most important female in the State of South Carolina in the last century.

She attended law school at the University of South Carolina where she was one of four women in a class of 200. She was also the managing editor of the South Carolina Bar Review. She was admitted to the Bar in 1968, a time when women comprised less than one percent of the licensed lawyers in South Carolina. Thankfully, that number has risen to twenty percent.

She began her legal career as an associate and the sixteenth lawyer at Haynsworth, Perry, Bryant, Marion and Johnstone, which at the time was the largest firm in South Carolina. From that point on, she launched a career at many firms. She became the first woman partner of Belser, Baker, Barwick, Ravenel, Toal and Bender.

She was elected to her State House of Representatives in 1974, and she was the first woman in South Carolina to chair a standing committee at the House of Representatives. She was also the first woman to serve on the judiciary committee as chair of its Constitutional Laws Subcommittee.

In 1988, Chief Justice Toal became the first woman to sit on the South Carolina Supreme Court. And she is the first woman to serve as Chief Justice of South Carolina. Since her time with the court she has written many opinions that have become precedential in South Carolina. Chief Justice Toal is also a co-author of Appellate Practice in South Carolina.

In addition to her work on the bench, Chief Justice Toal has led the modernization initiative for the state court system in South

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Carolina. Using cloud computing, the system has reached all of the state and has become a model for the rest of the country. *Government Technology Magazine* named her one of the top 25 doers, dreamers and drivers.

She is also a very active member of the legal community. She is a member of the Richland County South Carolina and American Bar Associations, the South Carolina Women’s Lawyers Association, and the National Association of Women Judges. She serves on the Board of Trustees of the American Inns of Court Foundation, is past president of the Conference of Chief Justices, and past chair of the Board of Directors of the National Center for State Courts.

Beginning in her early years of practice Chief Justice Toal has been very influential in advancing the status of women lawyers. Here is just one example: she championed the cause of a woman law student who was appointed a page by her State Senator, but was denied employment by the Clerk of the Court because of her sex. In *Eslinger v. Thomas*, the Fourth Circuit held the practice to be unconstitutional and established the right of women to serve as Senate pages.

Chief Justice Toal has also taken an active role in supporting women colleagues, advising them to, “leave the ladder down” for the aspiring women who were following.

If you have an opportunity to meet Chief Justice Toal, which I strongly recommend, you’ll notice that she’s wearing a pin which is a ladder that was given to her by the Bar Association after she won a very prestigious award in 2004, the Margaret Brent Women Lawyers of Achievement Award, which she received from the American Bar Association’s Commission on Women in a Profession. The award named in honor of the first woman lawyer in the United States is given to women who have achieved professional excellence in their field by influencing other women to pursue legal careers or by opening the doors for women lawyers that historically were closed to them.

In addition to her many achievements in the law, Chief Justice Toal is also quite an athlete and sports enthusiast. She played varsity tennis in high school; she was the varsity field hockey team goalie during all four years of college; she played intramural hockey, basketball and tennis; she was a catcher on her church’s softball team; and she currently skis and golfs. She is an avid fan of the Bombers and the Braves and loves to follow the South Carolina basketball teams.

I’d like to close with a quote from some of Chief Justice Toal’s
clerks, which I think speaks volumes about her. As her clerks we’ve been amazed and inspired by her energy and dedication and her willingness to drive across the state to speak to a group of school children, a local Rotary Club, or a Girl Scout Troop. We are not exaggerating when we say that it is impossible to know how many future women lawyers that Chief Justice has encouraged through these selfless efforts. Please join me in welcoming Chief Justice Toal.