

# THE AMERICAN LAWYER

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## LIFETIME ACHIEVERS

*Our 14th annual awards honor lawyers who have had an extraordinary impact on society and their profession.*

### BETTINA PLEVAN | Proskauer Rose

**BETTINA “BETSY” PLEVAN PRIORITIZED WORK-LIFE BALANCE** before it was trendy. As an associate at Proskauer Rose in the 1970s—one of only a few women lawyers at the firm and the only one in the litigation department—Plevan didn’t hesitate to take time off or refuse late hours to look after her two young sons, one of whom had special needs.

“I just did it,” Plevan says. “I didn’t see a reason not to.” Largely because of her, in the early 1980s the firm began a program that allowed lawyers to work part-time for family reasons and full-time attorneys to take time off for family obligations.

Throughout a nearly 50-year legal career that includes heading the New York City Bar Association and Proskauer’s labor and employment practice, Plevan has sought to level the playing field for women lawyers. As the first chair of the New York bar’s Committee on Women in the Profession, she shepherded a 1995 study, “Glass Ceilings and Open Doors,” that documented gender-based pay and work inequality at law firms. “She started off making the major statistical study of a lack of women in the profession and created reports and she didn’t let go of this issue, to her great credit,” says Proskauer’s Michael Cardozo, a mentor who first encouraged Plevan to get involved in bar activities. “She pushed that issue very, very well and got a lot of people at the city bar association [and] elsewhere involved.”

“She is a trailblazer, both because she is a top woman litigator and because of her deep commitment to taking tangible steps to advance women in the profession,” says Morrison & Foerster partner Carrie Cohen, who worked with Plevan on the report.

Joining Proskauer as a fifth-year associate from Seattle’s Bogle & Gates, Plevan worked on the team representing the National Basketball Association in a now-historic antitrust case that ultimately led to the first free-agency rules in professional sports. Other career-defining cases for Plevan include



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“Find work that you really enjoy  
and work at it.”

the remand of a Supreme Court case on sexual harassment in the workplace on behalf of Meritor Savings Bank and the landmark case that she handled on appeal for Penthouse magazine, reversing a \$4 million punitive damages award against her client.

Along the way, Plevan became a go-to counsel for large law firms facing sexual harassment and gender bias suits, with clients that have included Greenberg Traurig; Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom; and Fried Frank Harris Shriver & Jacobson.

Plevan also served as chair of the American Bar Association’s Standing Committee for the Federal Judiciary from 2013 to 2014. Under her, the committee vetted about 80 of Obama’s 329 total judicial appointments.

Plevan, now 72, says she plans to work full-time for another year or two, then to continue public service with groups such as the Permanent Commission on Access to Justice and the Legal Aid Society.

“I really like what I do,” Plevan says. “It’s just been a lot of fun.”

—MCKENNA MOORE