A traditional Jewish legend posits that there are thirty-six righteous men in the world on whom the continuation of humanity depends. These men, although a more modern telling would most naturally include women, do not know their status nor do those people around them. They appear to all as most modest individuals and they are, perhaps, not of lofty calling. It is their goodness, kindness, and integrity, however, that infuses the world, despite its injustice, unfairness, and avarice, and permits humanity to survive. John Regan was such a man.

I leave to others: a thorough analysis of his scholarly writing about law and the aging, a field that he helped to create; the recitation of the many responsibilities that he assumed in associations of the bar, both local an national, and the skill with which he conducted committee business and encouraged discussion and advocacy; the defense of his many principled positions on matters of bioethics; the recounting of his impassioned arguments in support of life and in the pursuit of the clear processes society would need to permit surrogates to choose to forgo life-sustaining treatment; the recollection of his dogged, and technically brilliant work in support of a new statute and a new process under which adult persons could be provided with a guardian to assist them in continuing life with the functional supports that they needed. These were all parts of his life’s activities around which I had the privilege to work with John Regan.

There were many facets of this wonderful man. He was always courteous and considerate. He was always a teacher seeking to explain to others the principled bases for actions and decisions; why the law should be structured in a particular way was, in his mind, determined by the past successes and failures of the legal process, the theoretical arguments about individual rights and civil liberties, the notion of fair
and just operation of government, and the needs, wants, and desires of persons who might be relatively powerless in society but, nonetheless—perhaps even more so—required a focus on their needs and plans that was crafted with compassion and support.

He was a leader. Attorneys tend to be disputatious, fractious, and aggressive. John displayed none of these characteristics. When he chaired a committee, all got to speak and discourse was directed to the issue and was polite. The discussion stayed on the topic even if it needed a gentle shove, now and then, to keep it relevant. He could guide without imposing and lead without demanding.

Theoretical knowledge and complex arguments were important to John but concrete accomplishment was equally so. In the seemingly endless meetings, in which I participated to create the New York State Adult Guardian Law, there were lengthy discussions about the need of decisionally compromised persons and functionally handicapped individuals. There was the review of the development of the guardian reform and how that evolution was affecting the rights of elderly persons and the duties owed to them. But finally, there was the need to create a statute that was better than the one then governing the review of possibly incompetent persons. This new process, John argued, needed to focus on the needs of the individual and how those needs could most fairly and adequately be met by a society increasingly burdened with the graying of its population and concerned about the expenditure of public funds. Finally what was needed was something that was feasible and that would work. That was the outcome to which John, on this particular occasion, directed his energies.

John Regan was not one to follow intellectual fashion but rather to lead it. He helped to create the field of elder law and certainly contributed, as much as any academic or practicing attorney, to the development of a body of principles and procedure that would help to advance the interests of elderly persons as they age.

All of the above is true. But it fails to capture what was most special about John Regan. He was a gentle man who treated everyone with respect. He always remembered to ask about the joys or sorrows of life that so envelop us all. He always had the time to inquire about the personal and intellectual struggles to which so many of us so endlessly commit our time and energies. He was as considerate, supportive, and warm as he was intellectually bold and careful.

I first met John some decades ago at a meeting of the Association of the Bar of the City of New York, for which I was asked to write this comment. I never anticipated an upcoming meeting without pleasure.
knew that I would learn from the discussion and be comfortable in the context. I knew that the work that John had promised to do would be completed and that criticisms and comments would be respected and given a fair hearing. I knew that I, individually, and we as a community of lawyers and colleagues would benefit from any exercise in which John was a part or for which he was responsible.

The two areas of my life in which John Regan was most involved were the worlds of elder law and bioethics. He made giant contributions to both. His wisdom, commitment, and righteousness will not be replaced.