



## Basil A. Paterson

### *In Memoriam*

**April 27, 1926– April 16, 2014**

*Basil A. Paterson, former Co-Chair of the firm's Labor Practice, passed away on April 16, 2014. He was 87. "Basil was well known throughout the community as a man of action, as someone who set his mind to accomplishments and always met those goals," Basil's son, former New York Governor David Paterson, said in a statement. "He was a selfless leader and he dedicated his life to making sure others' lives were better. Throughout his life, he was known as a pillar of strength by so many throughout New York. For that, we know he was grateful." Harold Ickes, Chairman of the firm and Co-Chair of its Labor and Government Relations practice groups, stated: "We have lost a prince; an extraordinary inspiration; a wonderful friend... He was a wonderful teacher, from whom I continually learned. Over the years, I came to love him. He became my deeply trusted friend... Those of us who knew him are indeed fortunate."*

#### **Education**

St. John's University School of Law, J.D., 1951

St. John's University, B.S., 1948

#### **Early Life**

Basil A. Paterson was born in Harlem on April 27, 1926, the son of Leonard James and Evangeline Alicia (Rondon) Paterson. His father was born on the island of Carriacou in the Grenadines and arrived in the United States aboard the S.S. Vestris on May 16, 1917 in New York City. His mother was born in Kingston, Jamaica and arrived in the United States on September 9, 1919 aboard the S.S. Vestnorge in Philadelphia with a final destination of New York City. A stenographer by profession, the former Miss Rondon once served as a secretary for Marcus Garvey.

In 1942, at the age of 16, Basil Paterson graduated from De Witt Clinton High School in the Bronx. He was shaped by his experiences with racism early on. "I got out of high school when I was 16," Paterson had told New York Times columnist Bob Herbert, "and the first real job I had was with a wholesale house in the old Port Authority building, down on 18th Street. We'd pack and load these trucks that went up and down in huge elevators. Every year there would be a Christmas party for the employees at some local hotel. Those of us who worked in the shipping department were black. We got paid not to go to the party." He attended college at St. John's University, but his studies were interrupted by a two-year stint in the U.S. Army during World War II. After serving honorably, he returned to St. John's to complete his undergraduate studies. While there he was very active in social and community service organizations, among them the Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity, joining the ranks of the Omicron chapter of New York (now at Columbia University) in 1947.

#### **Political Career**

Paterson became involved in Democratic politics in Harlem in the 1950s and 1960s. A member of the "Gang of Four" – with former New York Mayor David Dinkins, former Manhattan Borough President Percy Sutton, and Congressman Charles Rangel – Paterson has been a leader of the "Harlem Clubhouse", which has dominated Harlem politics since the 1960s.

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In 1965, Paterson was elected to the New York State Senate representing the Upper West Side of New York City and Harlem. He gave up his Senate seat in 1970 to run for Lieutenant Governor of New York, as the running mate of former U.S. Supreme Court Justice Arthur Goldberg. The Goldberg/Paterson ticket lost to the Republican ticket of incumbent Gov. Nelson Rockefeller and Lt. Gov. Malcolm Wilson.

In 1978, Paterson was appointed as a Deputy Mayor of New York City by then Mayor Ed Koch. He stepped down as deputy mayor in 1979 to become Secretary of State of New York, the first black person in the post, and served until the end of the Hugh Carey administration in 1982.

Paterson also served as Chairman of the National Grid Foundation Board of Directors. In 2013, Mr. Paterson was appointed by the New York State Senate to serve as a Commissioner of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey to assist with critical reforms at the organization.

### Legal Career

Paterson joined what is now Meyer, Suozzi, English & Klein, P.C. in the early 1980s. He served as co-chair of the firm's labor law practice, along-side political force Harold M. Ickes, until 2013. Among the more than forty labor unions the firm has as clients, Paterson personally represented Local 1199/SEIU and the United Federation of Teachers.

Paterson chaired the New York City Mayor's Judiciary Committee for four years and the New York State Governor's Judicial Screening Panel for the Second Department for eight years. He ended his tenure at the Commission on Judicial Nominations after serving for twelve years. He also served for ten years as a member of the Board of Editors of the New York Law Journal. In 2003, he was appointed to the newly formed Commission to Promote Public Confidence in Judicial Elections. He also has the distinction of having served as the Chair of the first Arbitration Panel mandated by New York State legislation.

### Honors

Mr. Paterson is the recipient of numerous awards, including the "Pierre Toussaint Award" from the Catholic Archdiocese of New York, the "Robert J. Kibbee Award for Public Service and Achievement" from the City University of New York, the Council of Senior Centers and Services' "Advocate for the Aging" Award, and has received citations from the Franciscan Handmaids of Mary and the Tri-State Consortium of Opportunity Programs in Higher Education. Mr. Paterson is rated "AV Preeminent" by Martindale-Hubbell, the highest level in professional excellence. He was the 2012 recipient of The *Long Island Business News*' Leadership in Law Lifetime Achievement Award and recognized by *Long Island Pulse Magazine* in 2010 and 2011 as one of the region's "Top Legal Eagles". In 2011 Mr. Paterson received an award from the New York Amsterdam News & Bill Lynch Associates, LLC entitled "Tying Communities Together" in recognition of outstanding service in support of the Labor Movement of New York City. In 2010, he received the "Lifetime Achievement Award" from the Peggy Browning Fund for Supporting the Labor Movement and Improving the Lives of Working People. In 2009, Mr. Paterson received the "Living Legends Award" from the City University of New York's Medgar Evers College. In 2008, he received the "Civil Leadership Award" from the Citizens Union of the City of New York. In 2007, Mr. Paterson received the "Abraham Krasnoff Courage and Commitment Award". In 2006, he was awarded the "Community Service Award" by North General Hospital at their Visionary Awards gala in New York City. Mr. Paterson was presented with the "President's Award" by St. John's University Law School in 2003 for his exceptional personal and professional success and the outstanding service he has rendered to the University and society.

Basil will long be remembered for his many accomplishments and his presence will be deeply missed by all who knew him.