Legal Planet colleague Jonathan Zasloff has previously written about the recently-announced retirement of long-time California Coastal Commission Executive Director Peter Douglas. I'd like to add a few additional comments about Peter, my long-time mentor, client and friend.

Peter Douglas has devoted the past four decades of his incredibly rich and active life to the cause of environmental protection. As a California legislative staffer, he helped draft the 1972 initiative measure that created the California Coastal Commission. Peter was also instrumental in the passage of 1976 legislation that made both the California Coastal Act and the Commission permanent features of the California political landscape.

Shortly thereafter, he joined the Commission staff, where he's most recently served as the longest-tenured Executive Director in the Commission's 39-year history. As Jonathan notes, the Commission has been one of California's most controversial environmental agencies, drawing criticism from developers and environmentalists alike, depending on the Commission's particular coastal planning or permitting decisions. But nationally and internationally, the Coastal Commission has received widespread praise for its work, and it serves as a role model for coastal protection efforts worldwide.

To put it succinctly, no one is more responsible for the Coastal Commission's environmental record than Peter Douglas. Without his tireless efforts on behalf of California's stellar coastal resources, the state's 1100-mile coastline would look far different–and worse–than it does today. Peter's unstinting advocacy of coastal conservation and public access to the coast will serve as his abiding legacy.

On a personal note, I first met Peter Douglas in the early 1970's, when as a law student I interviewed him concerning California coastal issues. A few years later, we found ourselves neighbors in Sacramento, where we commuted to work together on a regular basis. (My daily tutorials from Peter on the bus served as the best postgraduate education on California politics I could possibly have received.) For nearly 30 years, I had the distinct privilege as a California deputy attorney general of representing Peter and the Coastal Commission in a wide array of litigation matters in state and federal courts; it was in that capacity that I witnessed first-hand the vision and leadership Peter provided the Commission and the people of California. Throughout that time, he has been both a role model and friend.

It finally was age and illness, rather than the political vicissitudes, that prompted

Peter Douglas' retirement. Like all Californians–and advocates of coastal protection everywhere–I owe Peter an enormous debt of gratitude. And I consider myself fortunate indeed to have known, worked with, and learned so much from this wonderful individual over the years.