Judith A. Scott
came of age professionally at a time when few women practiced labor law on behalf of unions, and her achievements are all the more inspiring because she practiced in an area previously dominated by men and worked in such male-dominated industries as auto, mining, and trucking. For over 40 years, Scott has held key labor law positions in a wide range of unions, having served as in-house legal counsel to the United Auto Workers (UAW); the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME); the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA); the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (Teamsters), as its general counsel; and the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), as its general counsel for nearly 20 years. She also is a senior partner at James & Hoffman, P.C. in Washington, D.C.

A few years after graduating from Northeastern University School of Law in 1974, she joined the UAW legal department. Even as a young lawyer, she was involved with cutting-edge legal work on issues impacting women in the auto industry, including pregnancy discrimination, sexual harassment, child care, family leave, reproductive health, and safety. During her years with the UAW (1978-1982), her work included “Big Three” auto negotiations, and she focused on working women’s issues, including the historic implementation of the Pregnancy Discrimination Act in the auto industry in 1979. Her work with the United Mine Workers the following decade included serving as counsel to the UMWA bargaining team during the Pittston Coal Company strike in 1989. In 1992, she became special counsel and then general counsel to the Teamsters, thus becoming one of the first women to serve as general counsel to a major international labor union.

When Scott was named general counsel to the SEIU in 1997, she became the first and only woman to have served as general counsel to two major international labor unions. Under her leadership, SEIU has participated in many of the high-profile issues that reached the U.S. Supreme Court in recent years; for example, cases involving the Affordable Care Act, public employee union rights, marriage equality, reproductive health care, and President Obama’s immigration executive actions. SEIU represents more than two million health care workers, public employees, janitors, and other workers in the property services industry—over 50 percent of its members are women and people of color. Since 1997, she has helped SEIU design models to extend collective bargaining rights to workers in healthcare and other employment sectors. Because addressing economic inequality is one of SEIU’s top priorities, Scott’s legal advocacy also has focused on the rights of immigrants and low-wage workers, including homecare and childcare workers, who often are in jobs outside the protection of basic labor laws.

Since 2012, an important focus of the SEIU Legal Department has been support for fast food workers and the broader Fight for $15 and Union Rights campaign that has resulted in dramatic increases in the minimum wage in many areas of the country.

In addition, Scott has made a concerted effort to reach out to law students and young attorneys, especially women and people of color, to bring them into the labor movement. In the past decade, the SEIU Legal Department has employed over 15 women law fellows and over 50 women law clerks. Today, the SEIU legal department is comprised of a majority of women and people of color.

Scott was appointed by President Clinton to the Advisory Committee to the Pension Benefit Guarantee Corporation and is co-author of the widely-used book, *Organizing and the Law (4th Ed.)* (BNA 2000). Scott has served on the boards of directors of the Alliance for Justice, the American Constitution Society, the International Commission for Labor Rights, and the National Partnership for Women and Families. She was co-chair of the ABA International Labor & Employment Committee.

By joining a field of law—union representation—at a time when the number of women in the field was small, and then rising to the top of the field, Scott opened doors and advanced the professional opportunities for women who wanted to do similar work. She created a place at the table for women, not only for herself but also those working at her side or following her. From her earliest days as a lawyer, she worked to create opportunities for other women that historically were closed to them. Scott has fostered a vast and deep network of women within the labor movement and within the progressive community and deploys her vast connections in the service of one and all. From novices to experienced lawyers, the numbers of women who credit her as a major influence in their career development are legion.

Scott’s tireless work to improve the lives of working women, her accomplishments in breaking the gender barriers of a historically male-dominated area of law, and her extensive outreach and mentoring of law students, young lawyers, and established women attorneys wholly embody the values of the Margaret Brent Award.