



# Department of Justice

---

**EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE  
UNTIL 12:30 P.M. EST  
THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 29, 1988**

**"REINVIGORATING GOVERNMENT"**

**REMARKS BY**

**DICK THORNBURGH  
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES**

**TO**

**CARNEGIE MELLON UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL OF URBAN AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS**

**PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA  
SEPTEMBER 29, 1988**

**NOTE: Because Mr. Thornburgh often speaks from notes, the speech as delivered may vary from the text. However, he stands behind this speech as printed.**

I am pleased to be here today to participate in your 20th Anniversary symposium on the next twenty years in public service and education.

As you know, I had been enjoying a respite from the rigors of public service on the campus of a school very much like this one until one day this summer when President Reagan called.

He made me an offer I couldn't refuse, and I am now back in the middle of the fray in Washington. While, I have truly left my heart back in academia -- my wife Ginny has remained in Harvard as its director of programs for persons with disabilities -- I am much challenged by my return to public service during these very exciting times.

I have also taken advantage of one of the "perks" of academia. During the time I am on a leave of absence from my position as Director of the Institute of Politics at the John F. Kennedy School of Government, I am proud to say that I have retained my position on the Board of Visitors of this distinguished school.

My 15 months in academia were an extraordinarily happy time for me -- a time to reflect on my service as governor, a time to interact with outstanding faculty members, but most important, a time to become acquainted with students at Harvard and elsewhere, students who will make up our next generation of leaders.

That experience has given me hope for the future of our nation. Undergraduates and graduate students ask the tough questions. They have challenged me and we have had, particularly

among some of those at that boutique on the Charles, what can be truly called "free and frank" discussions on politics.

I.

What led me then to take a leave of absence, to leave the cozy academic life?

The answer, in five words -- the rewards of public service.

I found that I could not resist the President's request that I return to the Department of Justice, a department for which I have the deepest respect and affection, a department with profound responsibilities affecting the lives of all Americans.

Charged with enforcing criminal, civil rights, environmental, consumer protection and other laws of the land, the Department has a core of qualified professional people, many of them lawyers to be sure, but others, like yourselves, persons with backgrounds in the management and administration of government.

As the Attorney General of the United States, my challenge is to provide inspiration and leadership to these public servants, and I am pleased to report, that I have witnessed an enthusiastic and dedicated response by these career people, some of whom I knew from the last time I was in Washington as head of the Criminal Division of the Department.

I share with these co-workers a deep concern with the work of government, service to the people, and in the specific charge

of our Department, a commitment to the full and firm enforcement of the laws of the land and the equally important observance of the civil rights and civil liberties of all our citizens.

Students at schools such as this one, and the Kennedy School, are responding to the best instincts of Americans, service to your fellow man, and I salute you for your decision to enroll here.

I say this not in condemnation of those who go to other professional graduate schools. I am, after all, a graduate myself of the law school down the street, but we who have served in leadership roles in government need the talent of bright, thoughtful people from a variety of academic disciplines. And I personally have found government work to be more interesting than pure legal work and certainly, far more interesting, I suspect, than, say, investment banking. But that's a personal view, and government could not work without the contributions of all.

When someone asks me, "how do you reinvigorate government?", my singular answer is -- by attracting good men and women to public service. As evidence of the wisdom of this proposition, I need only cite the help I got from the School of Urban and Public Affairs in reinvigorating Pennsylvania government. More than a dozen persons associated with your school made contributions, including your dean, who served as chair of our Council on Crime and Delinquency during my two terms as governor, and Associate Dean Harold Miller upon whom I relied for advice on

planning and policy. In addition, Rick Stafford was my legislative director and later my executive assistant, Dan Nagin played a key role in our Department of Revenue, and there are many other faculty and graduates who were instrumental in our efforts to revitalize Pennsylvania.

All of these people are here today. Let me add as well one who is not here today because he is on the job this minute at the Department of Justice as my assistant for management and administration, Murray Dickman.

## II.

While getting good people is the answer to reinvigorating government, like many answers, it begs a question. The question is, what are those factors which will attract good men and women to public service? Many factors deserve discussion, but I believe the three most important today are: compensation, integrity and leadership.

Compensation for a job well done comes in a number of forms. Those entering into a career in public service, particularly those with advanced degrees from institutions such as this one, are never going to be fully compensated in the pocketbook for their hard work. The report issued this week by the Office of Personnel Management documents the fact that government salaries lag 24 percent on average behind those in business.

Although we have made significant strides in public salaries and have devised innovative plans for providing extra pay for those who make significant contributions, public salaries are never going to match the potential rewards in the law or business.

The reward, I have found, is in the satisfaction gained from making a contribution to improving the quality of life for one's fellow citizens: from helping a retarded person move from a cold institution to a friendly group home, from helping a laid-off steelworker receive training for a new job in robotics, from improving highways and bridges and tackling the ever-present pothole, from upgrading our educational programs, or by simply making it easier for a person to renew an automobile license.

The challenges in public service are many. A large part of the reward lies in being a part of meeting them.

Today's students can help by moving from the "me generation" to the "I generation", that is, a generation of intelligence, integrity and inspiration.

Integrity is the second of those issues which I believe confront the person contemplating public service. What does Rodney Dangerfield say, "I don't get no respect"? Well, frankly, all too often those working for government, at the local, state and national levels, have the same complaint.

The public today looks down upon government service, and is often severely critical of bureaucrats. Unfortunately, the

public too often reads only about the questionable actions of one person and condemns a whole department.

One of the key lessons I have learned is that assuring integrity in any organization, from a corner convenience store to a federal cabinet agency, cannot be addressed indirectly. Subordinates should not be left to speculate as to the values of their organizations. Clear and explicit signals must come from the top leadership, lest any confusion or uncertainty remain over what is, and is not, permissible conduct. To do otherwise allows informal and potentially subversive "codes of conduct" to be transmitted with a wink and a nod, and encourages an inferior ethical system based on "going along to get along" or on the notion that "everybody's doing it."

Investigation and prosecution of violators is essential and I have done my share in my professional lifetime. But even more important for the long-range health of the system is an aggressive and visible commitment to observing sound ethical principles before the fact, so as to encourage the best instincts of loyal public servants and to hold the worst instincts of others in check.

We found in Harrisburg that cleaner government also has an observable effect on productivity and efficiency. People who work in government want to be proud of their jobs, and they work better when they are. We saw this especially with PennDOT.

At the end of the 1970s, Pennsylvania had the largest highway indebtedness, the lowest credit rating and the lowest federal aid drawdown among the 50 states. We also had a deteriorating highway network and a swollen bureaucracy. It got to the point that even honest and useful PennDOT employees were ashamed to tell their neighbors where they worked. But after our reform efforts, including institution of a code of conduct and merit hiring and promotion policies, these workers proudly accepted accolades, not only for an improved reputation, but for better highways, completed "missing links" and new bridge construction.

This brings me to my third point, leadership. The persons at the top must set and demonstrate high standards; in order to attract others to public service.

Our success at PennDOT, for example, would not have been possible without the guiding hand of Tom Larson, who left his comfortable academic post at Penn State, for life in the fast lane at PennDOT. His leadership abilities inspired others to join him in public service and these people in turn attracted yet others.

### III.

In closing, let me acknowledge the circular nature of my points. I have said that reinvigorating government is done by attracting good people to public service. And I have said, that

attracting good people to public service involves having good people already there. This brings us to the subject of elections -- the process by which the public chooses our government leaders.

And, in looking ahead to the next 20 years at this school, I would like to advance an idea I have been contemplating and working on for the last year. That is, the need for further study, understanding and teaching of the position of the elected official in our governmental system.

Elected officials are at the center of our democratic government. In the final analysis, they make the important public policy decisions by which we all live. The better their capabilities, the better our representative government should be.

Yet they are little studied and, consequently, too little is understood about who they are, and what they think and how they act.

There is, of course, a need to cope with the problem of attracting people, especially young people, to elective politics as a career or, at least, to consider it as a viable career option. But there is more.

If we understood more about our elected officials, we could not only teach more and recruit more people into seeking public office, we could improve the ability of the media and the public to understand and better appreciate our political process and the

environment within which our elected leaders must survive and thrive.

I have devoted a considerable amount of time to this matter in the past year at the Kennedy School where there is an ongoing effort in this direction. And, in my role as a member of the Board of Visitors at this school, I will be encouraging efforts by Dean Blumstein to look more closely at the role of politics and political campaigns in our governmental process.

In 20 years, SUPA has earned a reputation for outstanding scholarship and service. In the next two decades, we must expand on this base and look for new opportunities for service.

Throughout my career I have lived by the philosophy that the best politics is good government. From my experience, there can be no more rewarding work than politics and government service, and I hope that you will join me with pride and enthusiasm in considering careers in the public sector. You won't regret it and your nation, state and community will be the better for your contributions.

Thank you.