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DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

GIFTED AND TALENTED EDUCATION PROGRAM

BREAKFAST FOR CHAMPIONS 1993

Friday, June 11, 1993

SPEAKER: THE HONORABLE JANET RENO, U.S. ATTORNEY GENERAL

Duke Zeibert's Restaurant
1050 Connecticut Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C.

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P R O C E E D I N G S

(8:30 a.m.)

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3 MS. RENO: Thank you so much. It is a very
4 great honor to be here with you this morning. Dr. Smith,
5 I would like to thank the Washington public schools. I
6 have visited now I think three schools, and you have made
7 me feel so welcome. You have given me a sense of
8 community, missing home in Miami as I do, and I am
9 beginning to feel a part of Washington thanks to the
10 public school system and I deeply appreciate that.

11 In these last three months, my life has kind of
12 come before me in one flash because I have had to pull
13 together all my life to explain it to the Judiciary
14 Committee and explain it to newspaper reporters and why I
15 do things and whether I wrestle alligators or not and all
16 sorts of things like that.

17 (Laughter.)

18 MS. RENO: I have never really wrestled an
19 alligator. I put a baby alligator to sleep.

20 It is special to me because as I met the sixth
21 graders, I can remember my sixth grade class in South
22 Miami Elementary and learning about Beethoven for the
23 first time and learning about geology for the first time.
24 I remember graduating from high school and wondering what
25 the future would bring to me, never dreaming that all the

1 things that have happened to me would. It gives me cause
2 to remember what I have learned that I might share with
3 you that might be helpful.

4 One of the most important lessons was learned
5 when I was about 10 years old. We lived in a little frame
6 house. We did not have very much money, and the four
7 children were causing us to outgrow the house very
8 quickly. One afternoon my mother picked us up after
9 school and she said I'm going to build a house. We said
10 what do you know about building a house and she said I'm
11 going to learn. She went to the brick mason and to the
12 electrician and to the plumber and she asked them how you
13 build a house. She did it. She dug the foundation with
14 her own hands with a pick and shovel. She laid the block.
15 She put in the electricity and the plumbing, and my father
16 would help her with the heavy work when he came home at
17 night and friends would help on weekends.

18 I still live in that house or lived in that
19 house when I left Dade County, and every time I came down
20 the driveway at night that house was a symbol to me. If I
21 had had a hard day at the office and a difficult problem
22 to solve, I thought you can do anything you really want to
23 if it is the right thing to do and you put your mind to
24 it.

25 People said when I came to Washington how are

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1 you going to be Attorney General. You've not had any
2 experience in Washington or with the federal government.
3 I remember you take it one day at a time. You talk, you
4 ask questions, you learn, and you try to do the right
5 thing, and it can make a difference.

6 But sometimes you don't win. Once I ran for
7 office and I lost my election after having campaigned on
8 what I believed to be the right thing to do. I will never
9 forget during the course of the campaign a man speaking to
10 me. He had made a very brave decision to vote for a
11 resolution ending the segregation of public schools in
12 Florida in 1956 in the legislature. He knew he was coming
13 home to overwhelming political defeat for this vote of
14 courage. He had been out of office for 15 years, but he
15 was campaigning for mayor. He said, Janet, just keep on
16 doing and saying what you believe to be right. Don't
17 pussyfoot, don't talk out of both sides of your mouth just
18 to be popular. Say what you believe and you will wake up
19 the next morning feeling good about yourself. But if you
20 pussyfoot and equivocate and try to be Ms. Popularity, you
21 will wake up the next morning feeling miserable. Well, I
22 did not feel exactly good the morning after my election,
23 but I remembered what he told me, and that is what I have
24 tried to follow ever since.

25 It also helps to learn what I did. Somebody,

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1 some kind soul, I suspect my brother, put a biography of
2 Abraham Lincoln on my bedside table and it was helpful to
3 learn that Lincoln had lost his first election. It helps
4 to know how to lose and it is not the end of the world.
5 You pick yourself up and move ahead.

6 People tell me that I am very popular right now,
7 but I know better than anyone else that popularity can
8 fade tomorrow and that you're not taken with what people
9 say about you. You appreciate their warm support and
10 their kindness and their gentle hugs when the going gets
11 rough, but you remember you've got an obligation to
12 people, to everyone to do the right thing.

13 The most special obligation you have -- and it
14 is so wonderful to see parents. One parent said I'm just
15 the mother and I said no, you are the person responsible.

16 Of all the things that have ever happened to me,
17 two of the most important things involve something other
18 than profession. About eight years ago a friend died,
19 leaving me as the legal guardian of her 15-year old twins,
20 a boy and a girl. The girl was in love, and I have
21 learned an awful lot about raising children in the last
22 eight years.

23 (Laughter.)

24 MS. RENO: It is the single most difficult thing
25 in the world to do. It takes love and hard work and

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1 intelligence and an awful lot of luck.

2 But my young friends, I want to tell you that of
3 all the things that I have done, nothing has made me
4 prouder than when I sent her off to school and she threw
5 her arms around my neck and said thank you, I couldn't
6 have done it without you.

7 Not just to your children, but to your parents.
8 This past summer my mother was not well, but I put her in
9 a motor home and I took her all the way to Maine stopping
10 at her grandmother's house that still stood in Sunny Side,
11 Georgia, and showed her the world and gave her an
12 opportunity, even though she was very old and very sick,
13 to see the world. She had a wonderful time. That is as
14 important to me as being Attorney General, doing your duty
15 to your family.

16 Congratulations. Have a wonderful summer. I
17 think it is just splendid what you have done, and I think
18 it is splendid that you are honored here today. I am so
19 grateful to be a part of it and to be a part of
20 Washington. Thank you.

21 (Applause.)

22 (Whereupon, at 8:37 a.m., the speech was
23 concluded.)

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