



DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

Remarks of

ATTORNEY GENERAL JANET RENO

Lawyers for Children:

Tribute to John Edward Smith

Friday, February 18, 2000

Intercontinental Hotel

Miami, Florida

P R O C E E D I N G S

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I am so glad to be home.

(Laughter.)

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: At a moment in one of the great cities of this world, a city where you can wake up on a February morning and see the blue sky and the white clouds and the greatness of this area, a city where you can see people feel strongly about the things they care deeply about.

(Laughter.)

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: A city that is home to me, where, in a matter of an hour, I can see my whole life pass before me, wonderful people who have helped me become a lawyer, people who have seen me through so much. It is a great city

and I love it all.

That's why it is so special that you permit me to talk about John today. But I'd like to say a word about you. You're a great lawyer and your commitment to the public good and the interest of this Nation has been a model for me. And I thank you for all your thoughtfulness and your kindness to me.

(Applause.)

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Yes, John, as you will follow in the plan, and Steve -- John was a good steamer.

(Laughter.)

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: And I remember how he put it together, and then he just kind of disappeared. And he would say, if he saw this, "Aw, shucks."

(Laughter.)

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: But he would be so proud.

John and Sarah are some of the dearest friends I have ever had. They have been with me through riots and up rivers. John was a wonderful lawyer. He was as honest as the day was long. He knew the law. He had a regard for people. But I put him into three categories. He was a fierce advocate.

If John was on your side, you were already way out on the way towards victory. If you needed protecting, you had one of the greatest protectors in the world. John could be absolutely fierce when he knew he was right.

But he had a rare talent. There are many lawyers who are good advocates; not that many are both great advocates and great peacemakers. And John Smith was a marvelous peacemaker. "Oh, Janet, don't do that. Why don't you just try it this way. It will work out a little better and everybody will be happy."

(Laughter.)

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: And he would be right.

But lawyers who are both advocates and peacemakers, many of them are not good problem-solvers. They don't know how to analyze the facts to come up with a solution that avoids litigation for the future and avoids the need for peacemaking. John Smith was one of the best problem-solvers I have ever known.

For 33 years, he solved problems for so many of us in Miami. He chaired the Legal Services of Greater Miami for two terms. He was on the Governor's Task Force on Housing and Urban Development. Day in and day out, about housing, what we could do to ensure that people had access to housing, that there was not discrimination. And he gave black business owners new opportunities and created innovative ways.

But he was also president of the Coconut Grove Elementary School PTA. And as someone pointed out, he was good on the little problems and the big problems. John could have a vision, whether it was Tallahassee or Washington, and getting new ideas. And then he would be solving somebody's problem, some issue at an elementary school that made all the difference for that day. He was a rare person of vision and he had an attention to detail that was profound.

He would be so proud of where you all have gone -- this pot, this seed. All the representation of the abused and neglected children would be close to his heart.

And, Mr. Levinson, where are you? He would be very proud to see you receive this award today, because he would have appreciated the fact that you went into the facts as well as into the law to understand how it should be shaped together.

He would be so proud of the efforts underway, through Lawyers for Children in America, to teach our young people how to resolve conflicts without knives and guns and fists,

how to talk together and listen together and solve their problems together. We can do new things because of what Lawyers for Children in America is doing. And my thanks to Evan, Mr. Shaw, my thanks to Wilmer, Cutler & Pickering. I feel an affinity now that I'm in Washington.

And my thanks and great affection to Steel, Hecker & Davis. I salute you all for carrying on such wonderful dreams that John had. But I want to tell you something that is very important about the dreams. John wasn't afraid to dream, and he made his dreams come true. And your dreams can come true for the children of this Nation.

Too many children are still dying on our streets in drive-by shootings. Too many children are left unsupervised in the afternoons and evenings. Too many children have too many things that need to be done for them to give them half a fighting chance for a strong and constructive life.

This community shows what can be done. And there is an example that I would like to share with you. In 1987, about five or six people launched a drug court here in Miami. The public defender, the judges, and the county were all in this together. Ten years later, I came back to this community to celebrate the 10th anniversary of drug courts. And there are over 300 in the country, 200 more on the drawing board, and everywhere I go people are saying drug courts are making a difference.

This community has shown what you can do when you dream enough and fight hard enough to make that dream come true. And just recently I went to a meeting of mayors, interested in what they could do to give children an even greater chance. They said, we now understand how important prevention is, how important it is that we keep our children out of trouble and give them a strong and positive future. When you took office, we didn't think much about prevention.

We can make a difference. And this community, as young as it is, as wonderfully and magnificent and diverse as it is, is an example of how a community comes together, resolves

its problems, moves ahead, to work together on the continuing issues that face us. It is so wonderful to be home.

(Applause.)

(End of remarks.)