



CELEBRATING FLORIDA'S FIRST 150 WOMEN LAWYERS

HONOREE AND KEYNOTE SPEAKER

JANET RENO

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SHERATON HOTEL

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(After an introduction and standing ovation.)

MS. RENO: It is so wonderful to be home.

(Applause.)

MS. RENO: We think of a place as home. But home to me, the heart and sole of home, are the people who are there, the people who have been there before us, that are there now, and that are to come.

And I look out over this room and think what it was like in 1963, and look at it now. That's pretty wonderful.

(Applause.)

MS. RENO: I am so glad to be home with people like Dixie Chastain who paved the way for me and made it seem possible.

I am so glad to be home with all the people of the community I love, people who have touched my life in so many ways, with loving kindness, with joy, with support,

and sometimes with anger and rejection.

I love you all, for you have taught me humility. My skin has thickened a bit, but I still want to feel. But most of all, you have taught me to appreciate more than I can ever tell you the beauty and the wonder of the human spirit, an imperfect but a powerful force for good, made more so when we come together to talk out differences and try to better understand each other in a constructive, thoughtful way with respect and attempt at understanding, a force made stronger when we unite to protect each other as we did in Hurricane Andrew, a force made more lasting when we worked through alienation and anger to come up with mutual respect and a plan and chart for the future.

Tonight I have come home especially, though, to honor 150 wonderful people, women who have touched my life in the most very special way possible. You blazed the trail for me, you set an example.

Dixie Herlong Chastain when I was seven years old sat out under my rose apple tree on North Kendall Drive when it ended at 112th Avenue, and made me able to say to my mother, Yes, I can become a lawyer because Dixie Chastain is a lawyer.

(Applause.)

MS. RENO: The first case I ever prosecuted was in Judge Chastain's court, and she looked at me like, Hmmm.

And Judge Mattie Belle Davis showed me how to do it right.

And Reba Daner was so wonderful, and would come up and touch me on the elbow and say, You are doing good and your mother would be proud of you.

Thank you so much, all of you.

Arthenia was my ally when I went to the plate one day and questioned the adversity of a certain counsel. And so many people in this room have lifted me up and carried me along,

and you are wonderful.

Because of you, women have and will serve as members of the bar, as attorneys general, as presidents of the ABA, and I am looking out one day at a President of the United States being a woman.

(Applause.)

MS. RENO: Of course, my mother said she'd rather my sister and I had been disco dancing, but I think she came to like it, don't you, Judge Chastain?

So for opening the door to the future, for giving me the opportunity to use the law to try to make America safer, freer, I think we all salute you and honor you and love you.

But we must do more than just talk about it. In tribute to these wonderful women, let us consider what we as lawyers can do in the next hundred years to make our community, our state and our nation stronger, freer, healthier, safer and more prosperous. In honor of these wonderful women, who dropped the bread crumbs along the way, let us commit ourselves to some of the following undertakings.

And let's not just talk about it. Let's do it. Let's show how women get things done by looking at the whole picture and figuring out how to solve the problem.

First of all, we have got to make the law real for all Americans, not just some.

(Applause.)

MS. RENO: We have got to ensure access to the law, access to good problem-solving peace-making lawyers who also know how to be advocates and protectors and defenders when the going gets rough. Let us give access to justice to everybody in America, or otherwise the law for too many is not worth much more than the paper it is written on.

How do we become problem-solving lawyers? We take some of

the instincts that are in this room. Instead of saying this is the way you win your lawsuit, saying what's the problem that caused the lawsuit and let's solve it and get it out of the way completely.

Women are so good at that. Women are so good as peace makers, and you see mediation developing across the country as a tool that we prefer, mediation that again is solving problems.

Let us make sure that we cover every single person: That abused and neglected child who is alone, that battered spouse who is alone and defenseless because they cannot or do not have access to a lawyer, that hard working person who is making a nonliving wage who can't begin to afford legal services, and people charged with a crime.

There is another person in this room who shares with me what it is like to turn and look over your shoulder and see a man walk out of the courthouse a free man for the first time in twenty-one years. Don Horn, thank you again for that.

(Applause.)

MS. RENO: How do we do that? There is so much support for pro bono efforts in this room, and I congratulate each and every one of you.

But we are going to have to figure out how to gear law practices in the right direction, using community advocates, using services, working out systems that make sure that everybody gets represented.

And I have got to start with my own department and others have got to work together to make government more responsive to its people so you don't have to have people litigating with their government to get the job done. The government ought to do it for itself.

(Applause.)

MS. RENO: We must cherish and enhance the diversity of this remarkable nation, the diversity of our community and our profession and our nation. If we don't, segments of the population -- forgive me. If we don't, segments of the population will become isolated, alienated, and they will lash out in anger and with violence. No one should be left out. Every single person in America is important.

Now, we get into a lot of fuss about affirmative action. I don't think that there is a person in this room that hasn't benefitted from affirmative action.

(Applause.)

MS. RENO: My daddy was the police reporter for The Miami Herald who knew the sheriff who got me the summer job just after I got out of high school. Now, if you told me that I would be in law enforcement for the rest of my life, I would have told you you were crazy. But that was affirmative action.

And Judge Chastain sitting there and telling me that I could so be a lawyer was affirmative action.

And some have more affirmative action than others. Let us make sure we have a level playing field by making sure that every child in America has the same opportunity in terms of healthcare, in terms of edu-care, in terms of proper supervision, in terms of support and love so that they can grow in a strong and constructive way.

It doesn't make sense to wait until law school to deal with affirmative action. Let's do it right now.

(Applause.)

MS. RENO: There is another affirmative action in a strong parent, strong and caring parents. And I have got an idea. We have got to structure our workplace and our workday so that both parents can spend quality time with their children.

With cybertechnology as it exists today, if we can send a person to the moon, we can surely structure our workday so that parents can spend quality time with their children.

And let's start talking about how we structure that day. Let's talk about bold and innovative things, because there is nothing like it.

I remember my afternoons after school and in the evening and in the summertime. My mother taught us to play baseball, she taught us to make sponge cakes that tasted like rubber, she taught us to appreciate Beethoven symphonies, and she taught us the poems she loved. And I'm still trying to attach myself to Dickens because she didn't like Dickens.

She taught us to play fair, she punished us, she loved us with all of her heart, and there is no child care in the world that will ever be a substitute for was that lady was in our lives.

(Applause.)

MS. RENO: Let's have a two-shift day. A parent's shift, 8:00 in the morning until about 2:30 in the afternoon when you leave work to pick up both children and go and -- both parents spend time with their children in supervision, love and care.

And then you can have a golf shift that starts at eleven and goes to about seven or eight. And don't laugh, it's going to save a lot of money in terms of road costs because you won't need more roads for rush hour traffic.

(Applause.)

MS. RENO: Everyone claps when I say that, but let's start thinking about it and trying to implement something that does that.

But there is another thing that we have got to use some common sense about, common sense that these women have

brought to bear as they opened the doors for us.

There is a whole category of young people that they are perfectly wonderful, but they look at you angrily. They've just gotten out of prison, they have got a record. The first thing that happens to them is they get stopped by the police and the police wondering why they are standing on the corner.

These are young African-American men, ages about 18 to 35, who are trying to get off to a fresh good start, and keep running into the door. Let's all together open the door for them by developing reentry programs that give them a chance to get off on the right foot.

(Applause.)

MS. RENO: Now, people say that won't work. But this county with the leadership of the judiciary developed a drug court back in about 1987, and people questioned what a drug court was all about, but some of us thought it was pretty important.

People recognized that the courts have been overwhelmed for too long because other institutions with the families, the schools, the neighborhoods, they failed. And then the courts had to enclose, they couldn't begin to manage and couldn't begin to expect success, and people lost confidence with the courts.

But they are getting their confidence back because people are realizing if you contain a case load, if you provide resources that match the case load, you can make things work, and you can produce evaluations that show they are working.

I came back ten years later to the anniversary of model courts, tenth anniversary. There were over three hundred in the country, two hundred more on the drawing boards, and they are working.

Let's develop model courts for the juvenile court as well

as the dependency court, for domestic violence courts. Let's use the courts the right way and we can make a difference, as Judge Chastain and Judge Mattie Belle Davis and so many others have done. Let's use common sense and lead the way as they have led the way.

(Applause.)

MS. RENO: One of the great privileges that I have had in these last seven and a half years is to meet with my colleagues from around the world, but most particularly from the verging democracies of Eastern Europe or more established democracies that have slipped into tyranny and now are overcoming it.

You see the excitement in the new ministers' faces. They are filled with joy and they love the challenge when you listen to them, and then they come back and they had disappointments, they have taken three steps forward, four steps back, and you can begin to see a sadness in their eyes, and then they are gone and the democracy has had reverses.

Democracy is an awesomely fragile institution. Let us cherish it. Let us as lawyers in honor of these women give democracy our very best.

Let us enhance and argue for the fair and equal application of the rule of law. Let us use the freedoms we hold dear and speak out. Let us not be silenced by disapproval and intimidation. If we have got a gripe with somebody, let's talk about it, but talk about it in respectful and constructive ways as we try to deal with misunderstandings and confusions.

Let us not engage in the uncivil rhetoric that so often plagues this world, whether it be in Congress or otherwise, that tears people apart rather than builds them up and puts their best foot forward. Let us build up communities, let us build up this nation.

(Applause.)

MS. RENO: Let us speak out against hatred. Haters are cowards, and when they are confronted they most often back down. If they are left to their own devices, they grow and multiply and too often approach a phenomenon like Hitler. Let us speak out about what we hold dear.

But let us remember these remarkable ladies that have led the way. Let us just think for a moment about what they have done for us and let us salute them by telling them, Judge Chastain, when I'm your age I'm going to be sitting right there and I'm going to watch all these wonderful young women making this -- having succeeded in making this a safer, better, greater nation.

(Applause.)

MS. RENO: These seven and a half years have been the most extraordinary experience that any lawyer could have. I have loved the law all my life, and I have loved lawyers all my life, and I love them a lot more now.

There are great lawyers across this nation, the state and in this community, Hispanic lawyers, African-American lawyers. It is just wonderful to watch the caring, the concern that they exhibit in pro bono efforts.

Don't neglect public service. Don't neglect the arena of democracy. It is the greatest arena probably of human endeavor. It takes commitment, it takes dedication, it takes never, ever giving up.

Let us go forward to lead this land we love. In honor of these wonderful women, let us protect it, defend it, make it freer, safer and more wonderful for those who come after us.

(Standing ovation.)

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