



PRESS CONFERENCE

AT THE NATIONAL WOMEN'S HALL OF FAME

OF HON. JANET RENO

ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES

Saturday, October 7, 2000

New York Chiropractic College

Athletic Center

2360 State Route 89

Seneca Falls, New York

9:38 a.m.

P R O C E E D I N G S

CHAIR SANDRA BERNARD: Good morning and welcome to the National Women's Hall of Fame Honors Weekend and Induction Ceremony. I am Sandra Bernard, Chair of the weekend's events. Today, before a sell-out crowd, we will induct 19 remarkable women into the Hall of Fame.

Now, those of you who are history buffs may know that the idea to form a Hall to honor, in perpetuity, the contributions to society of American women started, like so many other good things in Seneca Falls have, over tea. And just like the tea party that spawned the Women's Rights Convention, the concept of a National Women's Hall of Fame was an idea whose time has come.

Our plans for the morning are to tell you a bit more about the mission, the moment and the meaning, and then to introduce you to the inductees. A question and answer period with those inductees who will be accepting their own medallions will follow.

It is now my pleasure to introduce you to Mary Ann Oppenheimer, the U.S. Executive Director of the National Women's Hall of Fame.

EXEC DIRECTOR OPPENHEIMER: Thank you, Sandy and thank you all so much for being here in Seneca Falls with us today. It's a thrilling day for the National Women's Hall of Fame, representing the culmination of more than a year's work. Induction is the linchpin, the core of the mission of the Hall. The National Women's Hall of Fame is a private, not for profit organization, founded in 1969 by a group of women and men in Seneca Falls who were dedicated to preserving Seneca Falls unique role as the birth place of the American Women's Rights Movement.

The founders of the Hall understood that people need to know, to remember, and to be inspired by the achievements of American women. The Hall's mission was then and is now straight forward and clear. And I quote, "To honor in perpetuity these women, citizens of the United States of America, whose contributions to the arts, athletics, business, education, government, the humanities, philanthropy and science, have been of greatest value for the development of their country."

We are not a museum about the history of American women or the American Women's Rights Movement. We are about the distinguished women chosen -- who are chosen for induction into the Hall. Our gallery, our web sites and outreach programs are about the lives and stories of these accomplished women. The Hall is dedicated to ensuring that their work and their achievements continue to inspire women and men, girls and boys for generations to come.

The induction ceremony is both an end and a beginning. Induction is the end of a process that starts with

something simple. One individual believing in the work of one woman, preparing and submitting a nomination to the Hall of Fame followed by screening and judging, each done by a separate panel of expert volunteers, the decisions are made.

For the class of 2000 we received 173 unduplicated nominations. Yet only the 19 women who will be inducted this afternoon were selected for this special honor.

Induction is also a beginning. The beginning of new exhibits to see, new achievements to recognize, new stories to tell. The induction ceremony is a moment in time. Well, candidly, it is several moments in time, renewing commitment to the mission of the Hall, reminding us of why we are here and why it matters. Induction is a time we celebrate together the lives of our inductees.

Even a brief look at this class gives clear meaning to your work. The class of 2000 covers every era of American history, from 17th century Massachusetts Bay Colony to the 21st century Department of Justice.

The class of 2000 represents numerous fields of endeavor: Scientists, physicians, writers, social and civil rights activists, religious, and education and government leaders. The class of 2000 represents the rich tapestry, the diversity of our nation and the women who have been instrumental in shaping it. Thank you again for being here, and enjoy your day.

CHAIR SANDRA BERNARD: Thank you, Mary Ann. The women who are selected for induction into the Hall of Fame are selected by a National Honors Selection Committee. And the decisions are based on these criteria:

The value of of their contributions to the society, to significant groups within that society, or to the progress and freedom of women; their significant contributions to art, athletics, business, government, humanities, philanthropy, science and education; and the enduring value of their achievements.

It's an honor to introduce the 2000 inductees, all whom have far exceeded this criteria. And they are: Emma Smith Devoe. And accepting for her will be Sue Lean and Elizabeth Pierini.

And they can wave to you if they are here, so you know where they are.

Mary Barret Dyer, accepted by Elizabeth Reininga. Majory Stoneman Douglas, accepted by Michael Chenoweth.

Crystal Eastman, accepted by Rebecca Lesh and Ann Fuller.

Kate Mullany, accepted by Josephine Sano. The Reverend Dr. Anna Howard Shaw, accepted by Eleanor Fullerton Sherry. Dr. Mary Walker, accepted by Rosemary Nesbitt. Annie Dodge Wauneka, accepted by Irma Bluehouse. Eudora Welty, accepted by Dr. Clyda Rent. Frances Willard, accepted by Sarah Ward. Dr. Ruth Simmons who will accept for Sophia Smith. And Dr. Paula Treckel, who will accept for Ida Tarbell will be joining us later this morning.

Those inductees who will be accepting their own medalians are with me at the front. And they are: Dr. Faye Glenn Abdellah. Dr. Sylvia Earle. Major General Jeanne Holm, United States Air Force. Bishop Leontine Kelly. Dr. Frances Kathleen Oldham Kelsey. Attorney General of the United States Janet Reno. And Bridadier General Wilma Vaught, United States

Air Force. And now the floor is open for your questions to the inductees. (FOLLOWING ARE QUESTIONS FROM THE PRESS/MEDIA AND ANSWERS BY HON. JANET RENO, US ATTORNEY GENERAL):

Q. In covering, this question is for Attorney General Reno but for everyone else as well, in covering Hillary Clinton often I hear she has to show twice as much in order to get someone's vote in New York State. Is it true that women, in order to show achievement, still have to strive even farther than their male counterparts in the year 2000?

A. I don't think so. I think what we all have to do is do

our best to figure out what the right thing is and then do it.

Q. The Attorney General, as the first female Attorney General, any time during your time in office do you feel like you're being treated differently because you are a woman? Because a lot of women say that's what they face in the workplace today. If so, how did you deal with that?

A. I think the reason I feel strongly that you don't have to work any harder than somebody else is I think you've got to believe in yourself, and know that you can make mistakes but that you have got to try your best to be prepared to know the issues, to know the facts and then make the best judgment you can and live with it and move on.

And I wouldn't want to discourage young women who say, well, I don't want to work twice as hard as somebody else. I'd say, believe in yourself, do what you think is -- you will enjoy doing. Figure out what the right thing to do is and then do it.

Q. When you are facing all that criticism during Waco and so forth, what got you through all that? Did you ever feel like you wanted to quit, it was too much?

A. Well, I would cite the words from Abraham Lincoln, which I keep on the wall right across from my desk: "If I were to believe all the mean things people said about me, might as well close this shop for business."

I'm doing the best I know how until the end. If the end brings me out all right, what people said about me won't make any difference. If I'm wrong, people saying I'm right won't make a difference.

Q. Being the first female Attorney General, the accomplishment personally for you, what was that like?

A. Well, I still pinch myself when I walk some places and somebody says there is the Attorney General. It doesn't sometimes seem that it's possible.

Q. This is a question for the Attorney General as well. As I'm sure you know, the State of New York is facing several Indian land claims, including one right here in Seneca Falls, this area is in the middle of one as well. Two questions actually.

Why is the Justice Department siding against the State on these issues? And how would you like to best see these resolved as quickly as possible, not to drag on for years and years?

A. We're trying to do our very best to make sure that the Indian claims are, and the wrongs done to them historically is corrected; that landowners interests are protected. And we would like to try to work it so that these interests are achieved.

Q. Attorney General Janet Reno, you've often been criticized as being - this actually can be for everyone - tough or cold. Would these complaints have been levied against you if you were a man, in any of your careers?

A. I've been criticized for being tough, I've been criticized for being too weak, I've been criticized for being too much of a social worker and too much of a prosecutor. Sometimes that indicates that I'm doing the job the right way.

Q. Madam Attorney General, you were asked a question earlier about Hillary Clinton. As you look at this race that's going on here in New York State, obviously she too is a woman who's come in for a great deal of criticism and a great deal of negative campaigning. To what extent do you think that has to do with her being a woman running for this office, and have you discussed it at all with her?

A. One of the things I've tried to do is stay out of politics, and I think it would be appropriate not to comment on the political race at this point. The Attorney General has tradition- ally tried to be removed from politics and the political season, and I'm here for another purpose.

Q. The Attorney General, you have now been cited just this morning by two of your fellow inductees here as a role model for them and as someone they look up to. Do you feel a lot of extra pressure on you because of that?

A. Yes. The person that I would cite is a person much more intelligent with a greater drive and love of life who spent her time raising four children, and the most pressure would be from my mother who would say, "Don't make a mess of it."

Q. Did you feel pressure because you were the first woman Attorney General?

A. I think I was asked that question that first afternoon when Senator Biden and I met with the press, and I think the most important thing is to go do the job. So many people think about what is your place in history, what will people say about you, will they criticize you? If you worry about what people are going to say, if you worry about failing, then you never try to do something.

And the important thing is just figure out how you do it, try to get it done. If you make a mistake, what could you have done to have avoided it, what lessons can be learned, and move ahead.

But as my mother would say, "If you're just going to sit there and worry about what people say about you you're going to get stuck in the mud."

Q. Well, it sounds like then something you almost had to block. Maybe not. Maybe it never entered your mind, but did it ever seep in your mind that, my goodness, I am for better or worse a historic figure?

A. Well, what I said was that I hoped to do the women of America proud. And I hope with all my heart that I can go home and have succeeded.

BRIGADIER GENERAL WILMA VAUGHT: Well, speaking as one of these women, you have.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Wait, it isn't over yet.

Could I just, on behalf of everybody here thank everybody who has made these days possible and this opportunity possible and for giving us the honor. It's just been, in these moments very rewarding. We appreciate all the effort that's gone into it, it's been a great honor to be with such wonderful people.

CHAIR SANDRA BERNARD: Thank you very much. And since I do have this position I do have the last question. So, just a few words from each of the inductees about what being inducted into the Hall of Fame means to you personally. Just a few words.

ATTORNEY GENERAL JANET RENO: When I see the people that I'm with, when I look at the people on the wall of the Hall of Fame, I'm just very humbled and very honored to be here.

CHAIR SANDRA BERNARD: Thank you to all of you. Thank you all for coming to join us at the beginning of this wonderful day. We hope that you can all stay and enjoy the festivities. Thank you.

[Applause.]

[Whereupon, at 10:42 a.m., the press conference concluded]

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NATIONAL WOMEN'S HALL OF FAME

INTRODUCTION OF AND ACCEPTANCE

SPEECH OF HON. JANET RENO,

ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES

4:16 p.m.

PRESENTER OF HONORS KAREN STONE (A&E Television Network): Janet Reno. As the first female Attorney General of the United States. You have had a life filled with firsts. Following your graduation from Cornell University and then Harvard law school, your entering the government work was in 1971 as staff director of the Judiciary Committee of the Florida House of Representatives where you helped revise the Florida court system.

In 1978 you became the first woman to head a county prosecutor's office in Florida. As Dade County state attorney you were the first Florida prosecutor to assign lawyers to collect child- support payments from deadbeat fathers.

Winning election for four terms as a Democrat in a heavily conservative Republican Dade County you helped establish the Miami Drug Court, which has served as a model for other courts, helped reform the juvenile justice system and focussed attention on needed prevention programs for children.

Appointed United States Attorney General by President William Jefferson Clinton in 1993, you have worked tirelessly to reduce crime and violence, to enhance prevention and early intervention efforts to keep children from gangs, drugs and violence; to enforce civil rights to ensure equal opportunities for all; to prosecute violations of ecological statutes; and to build a Justice Department that strives for excellence and professionalism.

For your courage, determination, vigilance and leadership, you are inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame.

U.S. ATTORNEY GENERAL JANET RENO: I have been touched by so many wonderful people who deserve this medal more than I. And I have been touched today by the strength in this room of the women behind me and those who sit before me. I was taught by my mother to dream. And I was taught that if you worked hard enough the dreams can come true.

With the intelligence, the dedication, the caring, the

compassion, the smarts, the ability to preach that's in this room, I would like to challenge us to look to the future and learn from the past. If we use the energy and creativity in this room let us go forth together to give all the children of America a strong and positive future.

From the Book of Malachi: Behold, I shall send you the profit Elijah before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord, and he shall turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to the fathers, lest I come down and smite the earth with a curse.

Let's return father and child to each other. Let us bring parents home from the workplace in a way that can give them quality time with children while at the same time achieving their professional goals. If we can simply go to the moon, we can do that.

Surely, the world, we can take the energy in this room and see that every child has proper preventive medical care that can save us billions in tragedies every year. In a nation that pays football players with six digit figures, let us give teachers salaries that will attract them to that profession. And let us give our children an environment where they can grow without fear of lead poisoning and other things that get in the way of living.

Number two. Let us end the culture of violence so we will cease to be the largest industrial nation in the world that has more violence than any of the others. Violence does not have to be in this nation as we have known it. Let us do sensible regulation of guns so that only people who know how to safely and lawfully possess them and have the capacity and well meaning to do so have them in their hands.

Let us teach our young people, every teacher who teaches young people, how to resolve conflicts without knives and guns and fists. Let us teach conflict resolution and make it a part of our curriculum. Let us intervene in the lives of those about to get in trouble. Let us use our smarts that we've learned about mental health, about drug abuse

and treatment of it, and let us intervene early on before lives and families are damaged and destroyed.

Let us prosecute those that deserve it and let us give them sentences fair and firm and fit for the crime carried out fairly and properly. But 500,000 people a year will come back from our prisons and our jails in the next several years. Let us bring them back to something other than open air drug markets where they got in the trouble in the first place. Let us develop reentry programs with a carrot and stick approach that gives them an opportunity to come back to a future they can participate in. Let us bring America together.

In a few short years we will be one of the most diverse nations in the world. But too often that diversity is not reflected in our schools, in our workplaces, and in the opportunities that are afforded some Americans. Let us learn to live together. Surely we can take the strength of this nation, the wonder of this diversity and put it to work where it counts.

But most of all, let us not take our democracy for granted. For these 67 and-a-half years I have walked with ministers of justice and prime ministers of the justice department. They come from emerging democracies, they have stars in their eyes. They come back and they are sometimes disappointed and sometimes frustrated.

Democracy is so fragile, let us use the energy in this room never to take it for granted but to work at it, build on it, and give this nation the strength to carry on and meet the challenges of this magnificent millennium.

You have done me a great honor, thank you so very much. You have. Thank you.

[Applause.]

[Whereupon at 4:24 p.m., the speech was concluded.]