

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

WOMENS LEGAL DEFENSE FUND

1993 ANNUAL LUNCHEON PROGRAM

Friday, June 11, 1993

ALDERSON REPORTING COMPANY, INC.
1111 FOURTEENTH STREET, N.W.
SUITE 400
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20005
(202) 289-2260
(800) FOR DEPO

(1:35 p.m.)

1

2

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

3

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: My mother loved Carrie
Meek very much.

5

(Laughter.)

6

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: But Carrie, you know
what she would have said to you? Carrie, be careful.
She's going to get carried away with herself.

9

(Laughter.)

10

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Thank you so much for
this warm welcome. I see so many friends I have met in
these last 4 months that are forming a wonderful circle to
expand on my friends from Dade County. I see old friends
that have been my allies forever, and it's just such a
great honor and a pleasure and a privilege to be here
today.

17

These last 4 months have been time for a lot of
thinking about what's going on outside and around, but
particularly as one prepares for the Senate Judiciary
Committee, and as one answers questions as gently as they
can, did your mother really wrestle alligators --

22

(Laughter.)

23

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: And who is the real
Janet Reno? -- you stop for a moment, and all your life,
at least your life that you remember, is compressed into a

25

1 very short period of time, and there are so many points
2 that come to the fore.

3 You remember so many occasions and events that
4 were so important to you, the teachers who made such an
5 incredible difference in your life, the community that has
6 been behind you that has picked on you sometimes, has
7 pulled you up, has given you a pat on the back and a hug,
8 and then fussed at you some more, and you understand what
9 community is all about.

10 But I think the thing that has touched me more
11 than anything -- it's something that I have always
12 known -- is that the most important institution in this
13 Nation and in this world is family.

14 In the middle of all that has gone on in these
15 last 3 months, you remember the afternoons after school.
16 You remember your mother fussing at you about not getting
17 the pony shod in the right way. You remember her shooting
18 baskets with you and showing you how to do a hook shot.

19 (Laughter.)

20 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: You remember coming home
21 in the afternoon after school and seeing the horse that
22 you loved more than anything else in the world suddenly in
23 labor, lying right out in the middle of the field, and you
24 remember the calming influence of your mother as she told
25 you everything was going to be all right and this was

ALDERSON REPORTING COMPANY, INC.
1111 FOURTEENTH STREET, N.W.
SUITE 400
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20005
(202) 289-2260
(800) FOR DEPO

1 birth, and this is how it was done, and explaining it in
2 her gentle and wonderful and thoughtful ways.

3 You remember your brother teasing you
4 unmercifully so that you knew you'd never let anything in
5 Washington or any place else ever --

6 (Laughter.)

7 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: You remember your sister
8 showing you her new baby and then leaving the baby with
9 you, and as you come home to Miami you see the rocking
10 chair where you rocked that baby who is now 6 foot 9, for
11 3 hours while he cried till his mother came home.

12 (Laughter.)

13 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Family has made all the
14 difference to me, and then I turn around and I look at
15 America and at Florida.

16 Two years ago, the Governor of Florida asked me
17 to serve as Chair of a social service task force to make
18 recommendations on how to redesign the delivery of social
19 services in Florida. We held nine public hearings from
20 Pensacola to Miami by way of Belle Glade, some of the most
21 incredible testimony I ever heard.

22 In Miami we went from 9:00 in the morning till
23 10:45 at night. I had one bathroom break, and we ate
24 dinner at the podium, and each person spoke for 10
25 minutes, and around it all, through this incredible

1 strength, through all the resources that existed in this
2 community and in the other communities where we heard
3 testimony, the theme was the same: give me just a little
4 bit of help, and I can keep my family together. Give me a
5 little bit of support, and I can make the difference, but
6 for God's sakes, give me that help or it's going to fall
7 apart.

8 And what America has got to do is figure, not
9 just in talk about values, not just in concepts, not just
10 in words, but in real meaning, how we keep the American
11 family together and how we put it back together.

12 I look at the consequences if you don't care.
13 There are business people who say, that's just a social
14 worker talking.

15 Then let me talk to that businessperson as a
16 prosecutor, a prosecutor who watched for 15 years as
17 children came into the system as robbers, went further
18 into the system as murderers -- as you took their file and
19 looked back over their lives, and lives where they did not
20 know their father, where their mother had not been part of
21 their lives for some time, where the family had literally
22 disintegrated around that child -- and I will tell you as
23 a prosecutor that we will never be able to build enough
24 prisons 15 years from now, unless we build families around
25 children.

1 (Applause.)

2 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: If that businessman
3 still doesn't understand what I'm telling him or her, let
4 me then suggest that shortly after I took office 15 years
5 ago, the medical examiner in Dade County called me and
6 said, Janet, I want you to come see why people have been
7 killed, and see if we can't start defining a sensible
8 policy that we can do something about this.

9 We sent an intern over there, they put the facts
10 together, and it became clear that over the last 25
11 years -- about 25 years -- 40 percent of the homicides in
12 Dade County had been caused by husband/wife,
13 boyfriend/girlfriend, ex-spouse or significant other
14 disputes, and everybody thought it was just a fact of
15 life.

16 We designed a domestic intervention program, and
17 we started probing further. Unless we start focusing on
18 family violence, family violence that in many instances
19 can be prevented, unless we can focus on that issue, we
20 are going to be having generation after generation raised
21 in a world that accepts violence as a way of life. This
22 is the time to intervene.

23 To the elderly person who says, well, I've done
24 my duty by family, I took care of my family, and I don't
25 want to invest in programs or efforts, my response to them

ALDERSON REPORTING COMPANY, INC.
1111 FOURTEENTH STREET, N.W.
SUITE 400
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20005
(202) 289-2260
(800) FOR DEPO

1 is, unless we focus on family, the best care-giver of all,
2 unless we reweave the fabric of family around our children
3 and save the fabric of existing families, we are not going
4 to have children raised in this Nation with the skills
5 necessary to fill the jobs to maintain America as a first-
6 rate Nation, and the pension of those elderly people will
7 not be worth the paper it's written on, unless we make an
8 investment in the future, an investment in family in
9 America.

10 (Applause.)

11 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: We've got to sell the
12 idea, and we've got to sell a plan of action, and the
13 first step in that plan of action is to do what we can in
14 America to make sure that parents are old enough, wise
15 enough, and financially able enough to take care of their
16 children.

17 Of all the things that I've ever done in my
18 life, raising children is the single most difficult thing
19 I've ever been involved in. Approximately 8 years ago, a
20 friend died, leaving me as the legal guardian of 15-year-
21 old twins, a boy and a girl, and the girl was in love at
22 the time, and I've learned an awful lot about raising
23 children in the last 8 years.

24 (Laughter.)

25 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: It takes hard work,

1 love, intelligence, cousins and other people helping you
2 every step of the way, and an awful lot of luck, but it is
3 one of the most rewarding experiences.

4 We can focus on that effort because children
5 want it so desperately. Approximately a year ago, I spoke
6 to an inner city high school. The auditorium was full. A
7 week later, I spoke to an inner city middle school. The
8 auditorium was full.

9 I had done child support collections in Miami,
10 and they had written a rap song about me, so the children
11 knew who I was.

12 (Laughter.)

13 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: If you've ever walked
14 into an auditorium in Miami and they -- at the time it
15 was: Janet Reno came to town, collecting all the money --

16 (Laughter.)

17 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: And the children
18 appreciated that --

19 (Laughter.)

20 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: And they asked me, what
21 happens if he doesn't pay? What happens if she wastes the
22 money?

23 I answered those questions, but in each
24 instance, just totally coincidentally, I said, but the
25 real issue is, you don't have children until you're old

1 enough, wise enough, and financially able enough to take
2 care of them, and both auditoriums, coincidentally but
3 spontaneously, erupted in loud cheering, storming,
4 stomping applause from those kids. They so desperately
5 want strong parenting.

6 We start with teen pregnancy. For every teen
7 pregnancy prevented, we give a child a stronger chance at
8 a good, constructive life, and we give that 15-year-old
9 who wants to be a lawyer, a good chance at being that
10 lawyer, a far better chance.

11 How do we do it? We ask them. I started a
12 program for young teen mothers. The one thing they wanted
13 most involved three factors. They wanted to get back to
14 school, to have good child care because they were
15 responsible mothers, good child care where they could
16 return to school knowing that their baby would be taken
17 care of, and third, they wanted family planning
18 information. Trying to get that organized in a coherent
19 way was one of the more difficult things we had to face in
20 our community.

21 But it's not just the mother that counts as the
22 strong parent. I find more young men in my office in
23 Miami who are caring about being parents, wanted to be the
24 best parent, wanted to appreciate and participate, and
25 there are so many young men out there who sound like

1 they're indifferent, but they really care.

2 There's a wonderful program here in the District
3 for parents who are returning from prison, in terms of
4 teaching them parenting skills. We can do so much, if we
5 understand that parents are the force of the family.

6 Then we ought to focus on time to build family.
7 What you have all done in terms of the Family and Medical
8 Leave Act is just inspiration to legislatures throughout
9 America. But we have got to go further. We have got to
10 make sure that in every work place in America employers
11 understand that families have to come first, and that if
12 in this Nation we can send a man to the moon, we ought to
13 be able to keep our profits up while at the same time
14 freeing people's times to be with their family a little
15 bit more than we do.

16 (Applause.)

17 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: One of the major
18 comments I hear from school principals and teachers is
19 that I cannot get the parents to the school. Well, we
20 started in Dade County by saying that parents could have
21 educational leave, not educational leave to get a degree,
22 educational leave to go participate in their child's
23 school programs, to be a homeroom mother, to participate
24 in a counseling program. And if you did not have
25 children, you could go volunteer at school if you wanted

1 to.

2 I was amazed at the number of teachers that
3 would come up and see me and say thank you, a parent from
4 your office came to be in their child's school program,
5 and it was so refreshing. Just steps like that -- flex
6 time, telecommuting -- there are so many things that we
7 can do.

8 Now, my betters in my confirmation team may have
9 yet another heart attack.

10 (Laughter.)

11 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Because they told me I
12 could not say this before the Senate Judiciary Committee,
13 but I even got it out a little bit so that I knew I was
14 not plying under false colors. Why not consider ending
15 the work day at 3:00 in the afternoon?

16 (Applause.)

17 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Now, I am serious about
18 this, and if you think I am chicken, the first time I ever
19 tried this out was before the Greater Miami Chamber of
20 Commerce.

21 (Laughter.)

22 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: And they all looked at
23 me, stunned for a moment.

24 (Laughter.)

25 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: And then their faces

ALDERSON REPORTING COMPANY, INC.
1111 FOURTEENTH STREET, N.W.
SUITE 400
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20005
(202)289-2260
(800) FOR DEPO

1 broke into broad smiles, and they started coming up to me
2 afterwards, and I remembered that a lot of the executives
3 there were women.

4 Ladies and gentlemen, this is something that can
5 be done. We can do a lot more in 8 to 3 than we could in
6 8 to 5 on June the 10th, 1891, when we had gaslights and
7 no computers. How many people know what it is like at
8 3:30 in the afternoon -- may I speak to my mommy? I have
9 got an earache. And mother starts to worry.

10 With telecommuting, with so many different
11 approaches, we can make it possible for both parents to
12 leave work and pick up their children if we put our minds
13 to it. Now, everybody at the Department of Justice is
14 going to be lining up at 3:00 in the afternoon.

15 (Laughter.)

16 (Applause.)

17 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: But if we work through
18 this, if we work it out, we can make a difference.

19 If you had told me in 1960 that I could not go
20 to Harvard Law School because I was a woman, I would have
21 been outraged, and I would be a lot angrier today if you
22 had told me. But somehow or another we can put family
23 first, while at the same time achieving professional
24 fulfillment every step of the way.

25 But, in many instances, we will not be able to

1 do that. And there will be times where we will need
2 educare, and we will need care after school and in the
3 evenings.

4 Ladies and gentlemen, we have got to go educate
5 America about how important zero to five is. We have to
6 got to let the businessman know, the politician know, that
7 50 percent of all learned human response is learned in the
8 first year of life; that in the ages of zero to three,
9 that a child learns the concept of reward and punishment
10 and develops a conscience.

11 What good is it going to do to build a prison to
12 punish him 21 years from now if he has not learned the
13 concept up front?

14 (Applause.)

15 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: As we watch families
16 fallen away from children, we know the need for care, but
17 we also know the need to give that parent who has to work,
18 who must work, a piece of mind that their child is being
19 properly cared for. And when we look at the Carnegie
20 Foundation's report on the opportunities and risks after
21 school and in the evenings, we know how important it is to
22 start a new approach to America.

23 What is so magic about a certain type of school
24 day?

25 Let us look to afternoons and in the evenings

1 not just for recreational or sports programs, but for a
2 program for that computer genius who wants to keep right
3 on working into the evenings, art programs, programs on
4 literature, programs that can attract and make children in
5 this world and all that is around them.

6 But you look at what destroys families: a
7 financial problem. Somebody gets laid off. There is no
8 child support. The child support check did not come.
9 What is going to happen? The rent cannot get paid. They
10 are terrified. Do you know what that does to a family?
11 It just tears it apart bit by bit. There is no reliance.
12 The unexpected has occurred.

13 We have got to put every effort into developing
14 a child support enforcement system throughout this country
15 that is not dependent on the whim of some local
16 bureaucrat, who cannot respond to another State or does
17 not have the resources or does not care. We have got to
18 develop a system for child support enforcement that can
19 collect child support as effectively or hopefully as
20 effectively as we can collect taxes in America. And we
21 have got a long way to go.

22 (Applause.)

23 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: We have got to look on
24 other features that tear a family apart: drug and
25 alcohol. How many of you -- I bet everybody in this room

1 has been touched by somebody who said my son has gotten
2 into drugs; what am I going to do? I do not know what to
3 do. My husband is drinking too much; what do I do?

4 At first, they hide it. They do not know where
5 to turn. Then it gets so bad they get desperate and they
6 overreact and they bail him out and they empower him. And
7 then it goes on until everybody's lives are shattered.

8 Why not community programs that make drug
9 addition and alcoholism just what they are -- a problem
10 that needs to be treated? You have got the people who say
11 it is not a disease; it is a habit. Well, lung cancer is
12 caused by smoking that is a habit, but you can treat it.
13 And we have got to focus on alcoholism, on drug addition,
14 and do something about it up front, providing families
15 with the knowledge and the resources as to where to go to
16 do something about it before it kills us and tears us
17 apart.

18 (Applause.)

19 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: One of the most exciting
20 efforts of these last 20 years has been the wonderful
21 medical advances in the treatment of mental illness. And
22 yet, you look at so many different people who lead lives
23 of hell, whose families are just torn asunder by mental
24 illness because people do not know where to go to. They
25 hide it. They do not know what to do.

ALDERSON REPORTING COMPANY, INC.
1111 FOURTEENTH STREET, N.W.
SUITE 400
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20005
(202) 289-2260
(800) FOR DEPO

1 Again, programs should be immediately available
2 so that people will understand how to handle it. How to
3 care for that fragile elderly parent who is suffering from
4 Alzheimer's. We can provide so much to enable the family
5 to keep people who are frail and fragile in the homes.
6 There are so many people -- people who testified before my
7 committee that said if I had a little bit of respite care
8 so that I could go out and get away for an hour or two a
9 day, I would like to keep my mother in my own home. I do
10 not want to send her to a nursing home. But I am just
11 going mad trying to do it by myself day in and day out.

12 With an investment of a little bit up front, we
13 can keep people in their homes. We can make a difference.

14 (Applause.)

15 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: And that goes to the
16 ultimate issue of family preservation. Three children, a
17 single parent, working, about to lose her job, because one
18 child has been running an intermittent fever off and on,
19 hovering between 100 and 102, gets better, then suddenly
20 it is back up again. She is scared. She does not know
21 where to go. She does not have real health care benefits.
22 She makes too much money for Medicaid. She does not know
23 what to do. And then, one night, she just lashes out as
24 the child is crying and hits the child across the head and
25 injures him severely.

1 The other children are taken away, put into
2 foster care. This woman loses her job, ends up in the
3 back of an automobile under an expressway. All of that
4 could have been prevented, and that lady cared and she
5 wanted to be a good mother and she was struggling. And if
6 we had had a full service school where she could go for
7 immediate help, if we had had public health nurses that
8 she could call who would do a drop-in talk with her --
9 there are so many things that we could have done if this
10 community, if this Nation could reach out and help and
11 make a difference.

12 But we, too often in this Nation, are penny wise
13 and pound foolish. We would rather wait until the
14 homelessness occurs. We would rather wait until the
15 delinquency occurs. We would rather wait until the major
16 health problem occurs before we make an investment in
17 thousands and millions of dollars, rather than making an
18 investment of tens and fives and hundreds up front that
19 could make a difference and keep a family together.

20 Somehow or another, we are all going to have to
21 join together to understand that the family is the best
22 caregiver of all, that the family, with all the teasing,
23 all the fuss, all the leather belts that I sometimes
24 remember -- she only did it when we had dungarees on.

25 (Laughter.)

1 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: All that love and care
2 and hugs and the ability to say I love you are the most
3 wonderful things you can have in this world. And we have
4 got to preserve them.

5 (Applause.)

6 (Whereupon, at 1:58 p.m., the keynote address
7 was concluded.)

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

ALDERSON REPORTING COMPANY, INC.
1111 FOURTEENTH STREET, N.W.
SUITE 400
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20005
(202) 289-2260
(800) FOR DEPO