



## P R O C E E D I N G S

[8:40 p.m.]

1  
2  
3 GENERAL RENO: It is a special honor for me to  
4 be here this evening, special because I have always  
5 thought that students gave me more hope and more  
6 inspiration than almost anyone, and special because in  
7 these last 3 months the last 40 years of my life have  
8 passed before me very vividly before Senate Judiciary  
9 Committees and responding to newspaper reporters'  
10 questions as to whether my mother really did wrestle an  
11 alligator.

12 Having to fill out an application for the  
13 Judiciary Committee that commenced at age 18, these years  
14 have gone by over and over again in these last months, and  
15 I would like to share with you the feeling that I am  
16 almost back with you in 1956 June at Coral Gables High  
17 School, and I think of all that has happened.

18 One of the most important parts of my life has  
19 been community. When Leslie asked me to come to speak at  
20 this graduation, it was the day I had been sworn in.  
21 Washington seemed so big. It seemed not to have a sense  
22 of community. It was the Federal Government, and I  
23 worried about leaving the people and family and community  
24 that I knew.

25 And I thought: Oh good, I'll go speak to that

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1 class because that will give me a sense of community and a  
2 sense of people and a sense of place. The reason that has  
3 been so important to me is that community has been my  
4 life.

5 In these last 4 months I've heard from my home  
6 room teacher for 4 years in high school and she wrote and  
7 reminded me of the things I had done wrong and the things  
8 I'd done right.

9 I have heard from my American history teacher,  
10 who gave me my first love of the Constitution. I have  
11 heard from the man who gave me my first job and taught me  
12 how to get there on time and how to work hard and how to  
13 get ahead.

14 I have heard from legislators that I worked for  
15 and lawyers that taught me to practice law and judges who  
16 were very gruff and stern, but taught me how to practice  
17 law the right way.

18 I have heard from friends who taught me to speak  
19 Spanish and laughed at my funny southern accent: Es yo  
20 habla Espanol.

21 I have heard from people throughout Miami who  
22 have given me a sense of community. But I have heard from  
23 my Danish relatives and people that I knew in Denmark. I  
24 have heard from people around this Nation, including my  
25 first babysitter.

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1           And I can tell you that community and the people  
2 around you give you just what your valedictorian just  
3 said, great strength, a source of tremendous strength.  
4 For the rest of your life, reach out and draw from that  
5 strength the people around you will give you, because it  
6 is so incredibly important.

7           But remember, as so many people have touched my  
8 life over these 40 years, you reach out and touch others  
9 and make that difference and help that person, and pick up  
10 that elderly person and give them a sense of hope, and  
11 reach out to that younger person and give them a guiding  
12 hand.

13           But community is not always a harmonious world  
14 to live in. Back in 1980, our office in Miami where I  
15 served as prosecutor prosecuted a case in which the jury  
16 returned a verdict of not guilty for police officers who  
17 were accused of beating a man to death. The community  
18 erupted in violence and was very angry at me and demanded  
19 my resignation.

20           It was a very difficult time for me because I  
21 thought that this was one of the most important cases we  
22 had ever handled and we had put our heart and soul into  
23 it. They demanded my resignation and I told them that I  
24 would not resign because to do so would be to contribute  
25 to anarchy just to satisfy an angry crowd, and besides

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1 they had an wonderful opportunity to get rid of me because  
2 in 2 months I had to run for office and somebody could run  
3 against me.

4 But nobody ran against me, and my mother said it  
5 was because nobody wanted the job.

6 But what I learned there was that in the  
7 conflict of community, in the tension of community, you  
8 can again derive strength, and it is so important to reach  
9 out and talk to people and to cut through disagreement and  
10 tension and criticism and talk to them and discuss with  
11 them and reach agreement with them, so that they will  
12 understand and you will understand them.

13 For in this Nation, its greatness lies in its  
14 diversity, in its differences, in its fact that we come  
15 from so many different lands and that we are coming  
16 together to create a greater, stronger people.

17 When I left that community, the people who had  
18 criticized me, who asked me to resign, were the people  
19 telling President Clinton, among others, that he should  
20 nominate me. And it is important to draw from conflict  
21 and build from diversity a stronger, more harmonious land.

22 But also have I learned in these days what I  
23 have known, but never known so strongly: that your most  
24 important resource of strength is your family. In these  
25 days I have remembered my father, who read me stories and

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1 encouraged me to public service.

2 I've remembered my mother, who announced one day  
3 that she was going to build a house because the children  
4 were outgrowing the small wooden house we lived in. And  
5 we said: What do you know about building a house? She  
6 said: I'm going to learn.

7 She talked to the brickmason and the electrician  
8 and she learned how to build a house. She dug the  
9 foundation with her own hands with a pick and shovel. She  
10 laid the blocks, she put in the electricity, the plumbing,  
11 and my father helped her with the heavy work when he came  
12 home at night from work.

13 She and I lived in that house until her death in  
14 December and I still call that house home. And as I would  
15 come down the driveway at night from work as a prosecutor,  
16 struggling with how to solve a problem, that house stood  
17 there as a symbol to me that you can do anything you  
18 really want to if it's the right thing to do and you put  
19 your mind to it.

20 She sent us to college wondering how we would  
21 ever pay for it, but she said if you really want an  
22 education you can get that education. She encouraged us  
23 every step of the way.

24 There are my brothers and sister, who never let  
25 me get too big-headed, and just on the night I got sworn

1 in as Attorney General teased me unmercifully and made me  
2 feel about this tall and reminded me that being a person  
3 was as important as being Attorney General.

4           There were the 15-year-old twins that I became  
5 guardian of 8 years ago when their mother and father died,  
6 leaving me as their legal guardian. I have learned that  
7 raising children is the single most difficult thing in the  
8 world to do. It takes hard work, love, luck, and a lot of  
9 energy, and it is the most rewarding experience that you  
10 can ever have.

11           When I put that young lady on the plane to send  
12 her off to college and then when I watched her graduate  
13 cum laude in 3 years and she threw her arms around my neck  
14 and said, thank you, I couldn't have done it without you,  
15 that's as rewarding as any other moment I have ever had.

16           When I took my mother this summer as she was  
17 very ill across the Blue Ridge Mountains and to the shadow  
18 of the Capitol so that she could see the dinosaurs in the  
19 Museum of Natural History, I felt as good about that as  
20 anything I have ever done professionally.

21           Draw great strength from your family and give in  
22 turn to those who come after you. But then the buck stops  
23 with you. Community and family are important, but it's up  
24 to you now. Draw the strength, but learn from them and go  
25 out and do right.

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1 Don't pussy-foot, don't equivocate, don't talk  
2 out of both sides of your mouth to be the popular one. Do  
3 and act on what you believe to be right, and you'll wake  
4 up the next morning feeling good about yourself. But if  
5 you pussy-foot and equivocate and try to be everything to  
6 all people, you'll often wake up the next morning feeling  
7 miserable.

8 I ran for office in 1972 and I lost an election,  
9 and I woke up the next morning not feeling entirely good,  
10 but I'd tried to do what I thought was right and I felt  
11 pretty good. And I felt better when I discovered a  
12 biography of Abraham Lincoln on the bedside table and  
13 learned that Lincoln had lost his first election.

14 It helps to know how to lose. It's not the end  
15 of the world, but you pick yourself up and move ahead.  
16 And try to be honest with yourself and with others, try to  
17 reach out, try to talk with common sense, and try to serve  
18 others.

19 I challenge you all to public service. It is  
20 one of the great undertakings that you can ever engage in.  
21 If you decide to be a plumber, you can help make people's  
22 lives so much better if you're the best plumber you can  
23 possibly be. If you decide to be a lawyer, you can reach  
24 out and help others.

25 But all of us, no matter who we are, can reach

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1 out and serve the public. We can reach out and protect  
2 the environment. You are inheriting a very fragile  
3 environment that has been sorely damaged by my generation  
4 and those that have come before. Let us work together to  
5 protect the air, the water, and the land that we love.

6           Reach out to make our streets safer and teach  
7 others and work together to end the violence that tears  
8 this community apart, and make our streets safe and our  
9 community safe. And remember the word of the little girl  
10 at Raymond Elementary, where I visited this spring, who  
11 said: When am I going to be able to walk home and feel  
12 safe? We can work together to change the dreams for her.

13           And reach out to give all our children the  
14 opportunity to grow as strong, constructive human beings  
15 in a world where they will not live in poverty, where they  
16 will not live in fear, where they will have strong and  
17 wonderful families about them.

18           And reach out to this whole wide world and  
19 strive, let us all strive together, to learn to live in  
20 peace, without hurting each other.

21           But the bottom line comes back to ourselves and  
22 the people we love most, and it's best said by the last  
23 two verses from the Old Testament in the Book of Malachi:  
24 "Behold, I shall sent you the Prophet Elijah before the  
25 coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord, and he .

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1 shall return the heart of the father to the children and  
2 the children's hearts to their father, lest I come down  
3 and smite the earth with a curse."

4 God bless you all.

5 [Applause.]

6 [End of speech at 8:51 p.m.]

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