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HUBERT H. HUMPHREY CIVIL RIGHTS AWARD DINNER

Wednesday, June 1, 1994

Hyatt Regency Hotel
Washington, D.C.

8:00 p.m.

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

1 STATEMENT OF HON. JANET RENO, ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE
2 UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

3 Attorney General Reno: Thank you, Ralph, for those
4 very thoughtful words. But it was you and the people in
5 this room who kept me going over these last 15 months.

6 And I will always be eternally grateful to your
7 counsel, to your support, to your encouragement, to your
8 fussing when I needed to be fussed at, for your great,
9 great strength that has been so important to me.

10 I look out on this room, and I think of what
11 government is all about. It is about people. And the
12 people that you represent, all of the people in this room
13 are what really -- that's what's contributing to the
14 Department of Justice right now.

15 It is so special to see so many people here tonight.
16 This is a unique and wonderful organization. When I first
17 met you in the Old Executive Office Building, they told me
18 about Ralph Neas.

19 And I said, "Well, I've heard a little bit about him.
20 And I've heard about the conference."

21 You are remarkable, all of you, and the organization,
22 and the diversity, but in your ability to pull people
23 together to deal with the critical issues of our times.

24 What seems, to me, most important, is that the
25 conference allows those in the country who care so deeply

1 to speak with one united voice.

2 You work out your differences on a variety of issues,
3 decide on the best strategy, and work hard until you
4 achieve your goal.

5 Your single-mindedness of purpose is a model for all
6 of us in this country. Too often, we get to approach an
7 issue with a scatter gun approach. And we're not very
8 effective.

9 You're a good model for the Department of Justice as
10 well. I'm grateful for your talents. And I'm trying to
11 learn.

12 I am also very grateful, but sad, that I've had a
13 chance to work with you, Ralph, and to watch you in
14 action. For the last 14 years, the leadership conference
15 and the civil rights community has benefited from your
16 leadership.

17 When you announced today that you were leaving the
18 conference next spring, I thought, "What will I do without
19 him?" And then I thought, "He deserves it. What a
20 remarkable man. What a remarkable leader."

21 Thank you ever so much. America is in your debt.

22 [Applause.]

23 Attorney General Reno: To build cooperation and
24 consensus from nearly 200 groups takes a marvelous
25 listener, a great thinker and somebody who can get

1 something done. And I haven't met anybody in Washington
2 quite like you.

3 You're a marvel and a treasure for this whole nation.
4 For many years, when civil rights issues did not receive
5 the warm reception from the White House, Ralph and the
6 conference kept the faith.

7 You forged bipartisan coalitions. You worked toward,
8 and helped get passed, among other laws, the following --
9 and when you read this list, it is just so extraordinary
10 -- the 1982 Voting Rights Extension Act, the Martin Luther
11 King Holiday Bill, the Civil Rights Restoration Act, the
12 Japanese American Redress Bill, the Fair Housing
13 Amendments Act of 1988, the Americans with Disabilities
14 Act, the Civil Rights Act of 1991, and the Language
15 Assistance Improvement Act of 1992.

16 Before I came to Washington, that would have sounded
17 like an extraordinarily impressive list to me. And now
18 that I've spent some time here, I know, for certain, just
19 how extraordinary it is.

20 [Applause.]

21 Attorney General Reno: And now, there is a
22 President, and a Department of Justice who is committed to
23 the cause of Civil Rights.

24 The leadership conference has been able to continue
25 its efforts and work together with the Department to

1 achieve some new goals.

2 I am happy to say that your executive director and
3 his colleagues have had the opportunity to work with one
4 of the most wonderful people I've met. And Ralph has
5 already talked about him. But I am so glad you've got
6 Deval Patrick. Now, you have no idea how wonderful it is.

7 [Applause.]

8 Attorney General Reno: He shares my hopes and
9 dreams. He has the know-how. He has the ability to work
10 with people. And I am excited for the future of the civil
11 rights division in the Department.

12 Working with Deval, I want to build a civil rights
13 division and department committed and dedicated and
14 resolved to working with all Americans to eliminate every
15 message of racism, hate, bigotry and discrimination we
16 find; to appreciate and cherish the wonderful differences
17 amongst us all that have made this nation so great; to
18 bring us all together, to address together our mutual
19 problems; so that we can give all of the young people of
20 America a better and real chance at a safe, free, positive
21 future where their dreams can come true.

22 In particular, the Justice Department and the Civil
23 Rights Division are determined to continue to strike hard
24 and fast at individual instances of discrimination. We
25 are committed. And Deval is leading the way in an

1 aggressive enforcement of the Voting Rights Act.

2 We are enforcing laws banning lending and housing
3 discrimination. We are pleased to be beginning our
4 responsibility for enforcing the fair access to clinics
5 laws, which will combat violence and unlawful obstruction
6 at abortion clinics.

7 [Applause.]

8 Attorney General Reno: We are continuing our
9 vigorous enforcement of the Americans with Disabilities
10 Act.

11 We are mounting challenges to gender discrimination
12 by state-financed schools, including the Citadel and the
13 Virginia Military Institute.

14 [Applause.]

15 Attorney General Reno: In these, and many other
16 areas, we will continue to protect the proud legacy of the
17 civil rights movement and move forward to combat new forms
18 of discrimination and violation of civil rights.

19 Working together, I am confident that we can continue
20 to implement the kind of aggressive, far-reaching rights
21 agenda that will make the President and you proud.

22 I asked Ralph what I would do without him.

23 He said, "I'll be here when you need me."

24 I'm going to need you. I'm going to need everybody
25 in this room. And I look forward to that effort.

1 I'd like to take this opportunity, too, to focus on a
2 matter that will come before us all this summer, and that
3 I think is so important. I am very proud of the President
4 for his choice of Judge Steven Bryer to be the nominee to
5 the Supreme Court.

6 Judge Bryer has shown a strong and consistent
7 commitment to civil rights throughout his career. He is a
8 careful and fair jurist whose rulings in the area of
9 employment discrimination, fair housing, and access to the
10 courts, amongst others, have contributed to the
11 vindication of the civil rights of litigants in his
12 courtroom. He is a man who understands the impact of law
13 on ordinary people.

14 His nomination has our full support. And we need to
15 work together to get him confirmed.

16 But there are three people that have been very
17 important to me. And I would like to add mine to the
18 voices of congratulation to Henry Cisneros first.

19 [Applause.]

20 Attorney General Reno: You have no idea what it's
21 like to come to Washington a stranger, not knowing very
22 many people at all, wondering what the rest of the cabinet
23 would say to you.

24 And they just kind of look at you when you first
25 arrive like, "Well, we finally have an Attorney General."

1 [Laughter.]

2 Attorney General Reno: But they look beyond. And
3 one of the great people that I have met is Henry Cisneros.
4 He is so incredibly exciting to watch. He cares so
5 deeply. He is so committed to civil rights enforcement.

6 And in those days before he and Webb went to Vidor,
7 it was just extraordinary to watch how much he cared and
8 how much he intended that there would be no
9 discrimination. He is so deserving of your recognition.

10 Elaine Jones has been a marvelous leader at the Ink
11 Fund. But she's also found time to fuss at me, to give me
12 a pat on the back when I needed it, and to be a marvelous
13 example for me, to answer my questions about tactics and
14 strategy and the law. And I will always be indebted to
15 her.

16 But one of the great moments that I spent in
17 Washington was at a dinner at the Neas' house with the
18 Fisches.

19 And I will never forget that for as long as I live,
20 because you both made it seem possible that I could
21 achieve some of the dreams that I had for the Department.

22 You were cautious. You reminded me of how difficult
23 it would be, and how difficult it is to change the culture
24 of a great nation's government. But you made it seem
25 possible.

1 And for all of you, thank you so much for that night.
2 I won't forget it.

3 And I know of nobody in Congress more deserving,
4 nobody in this country more deserving of this recognition.
5 Thank you all so very much.

6 [Applause.]

7 (Whereupon, at 8:15 p.m., the speech was concluded.)
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