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PEER MEDIATION

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ATTORNEY GENERAL JANET RENO

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Woodrow Wilson High School

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Nebraska Avenue and Chesapeake Street, N.W.

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Washington, D.C.

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October 22, 1996

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2:00 p.m.

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

2 MS. RENO: Thank you very much. And
3 it is a real pleasure for me to be here today.

4 As State Attorney in Miami, I would
5 try to go to a different public school on the
6 average of once a week to talk with students,
7 younger and older, because I find that students
8 ask me better questions than anybody --
9 including newspaper reporters. And they also
10 have better ideas than most people I know. So
11 I really appreciate the opportunity to be here
12 today with you.

13 You are involved in efforts close to
14 my heart. The whole concept of mediation,
15 dispute resolution, and conflict resolution, I
16 think is critical. As a lawyer, I see lawyers
17 fuss with each other. And they go to trial.
18 And they waste people's money going to trial,
19 and then appealing the case, and then carrying
20 it out.

21 When if they sat down and talked with
22 each other, they could probably resolve the

1 case much more beneficially to everybody

2 concerned, at a lot less money and a lot less
3 time.

4 I am gratified to see that lawyers
5 across the country are beginning to understand
6 this more and more each day. And in the
7 Department of Justice, we use mediation and
8 alternative dispute resolution as a really
9 important tool in resolving some of the cases
10 that we have when we represent the government,
11 or when we are suing on behalf of the United
12 States government.

13 But I think not only mediation has
14 become more important to Justice Department
15 lawyers, I have tried to encourage them to
16 learn from mediation, and learn how to
17 negotiate themselves without even the necessity
18 for a third-party mediator, as a way of talking
19 problems out.

20 One of the things I discovered is
21 that it is a matter of communication. It is a
22 matter of talking to people and knowing how to

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1 communicate, and most of all, knowing how to
2 listen.

3 If I sit around my table in the

4 conference room at the Department of Justice, I
5 can see people with five or six different
6 points of view. And when I first start
7 listening to them, they are not listening to
8 each other. They are talking past each other.

9 And so we try to get them into
10 talking to each other, and listening, and
11 communicating, and having a respect for each
12 other's views. And it makes such a difference.

13 I see what can be done through
14 mediation and through negotiation, in terms of
15 settlements of conflict in the field. For
16 example, the way the FBI handled the Freemen
17 situation in Montana is an example of how the
18 Department is trying in every way it can to use
19 negotiation and mediation as an important tool
20 in resolving disputes without guns.

21 The Community Relations Service is a
22 tremendously important entity in the Department

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1 of Justice. And it works so well in doing so
2 much in communities to resolve disputes.

3 Sometimes the negotiation or the
4 mediation produces a result that can make such

5 an important difference. We are involved in
6 environmental litigation. And if we just win
7 the suit, we may not win the day.

8 Whereas if we negotiate the matter,
9 and work out the matter, or have it mediated,
10 we can not only say, "Okay. You are liable.
11 But here is what you can do to correct what
12 caused the problem in the first place, and here
13 is how we can work together to improve the
14 community."

15 Why I am particularly gratified to be
16 here today is to hear from you about your
17 diversity workshop. I think that this is
18 critical. I come from Miami, which is now one
19 of the great international cities of the world:
20 so many different languages, so many different
21 people from all over this Western Hemisphere.

22 When I first was growing up in Miami,

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1 it was basically a city that represented the
2 East Coast of the United States, and not much
3 more. And it has been so magnificent to see
4 how that city has become so much greater
5 because of its diversity.

6 I would like to know first-hand today

7 what you are doing here with at Woodrow Wilson
8 High, and what I might take back to the
9 Department of Justice to share with other high
10 schools across the nation in terms of the work
11 you are doing in diversity, and with your
12 workshop.

13 So one of the reasons, as I said, I
14 like to come to schools is you ask better
15 questions, and have better ideas. And I would
16 like to hear from you now about how you are
17 using mediation, about your diversity workshop,
18 and what I can take back to the Department of
19 Justice. And also any questions you have about
20 what we do about the Department of Justice, or
21 about what I do as Attorney General.

22 Just generally to give you some

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1 scope, as Attorney General, I am responsible
2 for the FBI, the DEA, the Bureau of Prisons,
3 the Immigration and Naturalization Service, and
4 most of the Government lawyers. So there is a
5 lot on my plate.

6 But I have got 103,000 people working
7 with me. And they are great people, for the

8 most part. So it has been an extraordinary
9 challenge.

10 I would make one final comment. The
11 fact that you all are here and involved today
12 is indicative to me of your commitment to
13 others. But I urge you, no matter what you do
14 with your life, to consider some form of public
15 service during the course of your career. It
16 is a wonderful feeling.

17 It is great to be a lawyer. But it
18 is much greater to be a lawyer using the law to
19 try to serve people, and to try to do it the
20 right way. These three and a half years have
21 been an extraordinary opportunity to try to do
22 that.

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1 And so I would like to hear from you
2 now about questions you may have, or what you
3 are doing here at Wilson.

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