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ATTORNEY GENERAL JANET RENO

The Bar Association of The District of Columbia
125th Anniversary

Held at The Grand Hyatt Hotel
Eighth & H Streets, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20001

Saturday, December 7, 1996

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

2 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Thank you,
3 Dwight.

4 I can't tell you what an honor it is
5 to be here with people like Judge Hamilton and
6 John Pickering and Judge Harris, and so many
7 others who I heard of long before I came to
8 Washington, and who have made me feel so
9 welcomed in this great city.

10 I appreciate more than I can tell you
11 the honor that you have done me tonight. But I
12 accept that honor on behalf of the men and
13 women of the Department of Justice. There's
14 some 107,000 of them. And they do
15 extraordinary work for the people of the United
16 States all across the country.

17 Prison guards in very difficult

18 circumstances, agents around the world who are
19 on the southwest boarder, immigration
20 inspectors, lawyers, secretaries and support
21 staff who I've gotten to know here in the
22 District of Columbia.

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1 Year in and year out, without much
2 consideration for dollars, they do
3 extraordinary work for the people of the United
4 States.

5 And too often, they don't get too
6 much credit.

7 But I can tell you from my three and
8 a half years of experience, they're always
9 almost all of them trying to do the right thing
10 trying to serve the people. And they do one
11 heck of a job.

12 Some are career, some are
13 appointments of this Administration. I see two
14 here tonight, three, four, five, I can't name
15 them all. But a special, real special

16 acknowledgement to my Deputy. I couldn't do it
17 without her. Thank you, Jane.

18 (Applause)

19 Public service is a wonderful
20 calling. I will admit that you get cussed at,
21 fussed at and blasted in the newspapers.
22 People spend a lot of time speculating on

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1 whether you have a fashion style, or you don't
2 have any fashion style.

3 They spend endless hours speculating
4 on what you will do when you grow up. There
5 are some very bitter disappointments. There
6 are some losses. There are some tragedies.

7 But I can think of no calling that is
8 more rewarding than trying to help the people
9 you serve solve their problems, trying to
10 uphold the rule of law, protecting the
11 innocent, indicting the guilty, but doing so
12 according to the principles of due process and

13 fair play, the role of defending this nation
14 and bringing peace to this world.

15 But it is not just those who work for
16 Government. It is all of us who can perform
17 public service. It's something that everyone
18 can do, and everyone can make a difference
19 doing it.

20 And this great Bar Association, over
21 125 years, has shown that each lawyer can make
22 a difference. Not just in billable hours, not

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1 just in the money they make, not just in the
2 firm they belong to, but in how they touch a
3 community, how they touch a nation, how they
4 protect an environment, how they make a
5 difference.

6 Jake, I want to be very brief in my
7 challenges tonight.

8 I challenge us all tonight to renew
9 the efforts that have been evidenced in this
10 room and in this community for so long, to make

8 together in a comprehensive way.

9 I have watched lawyers at Raymond
10 Elementary on a ladder with a paint bucket
11 painting the ceilings, and sanding the
12 ceilings. I've watched lawyers from the
13 Department of Justice at a habitat for humanity
14 project bringing a house into being.

15 I have watched lawyers in a community
16 center resolving disputes. I have watched
17 lawyers reaching out to make a difference. But
18 let us harness all that energy in a
19 comprehensive effort so that pieces are not
20 fragmented.

21 So that we work together with social
22 workers, and teachers, and community police

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1 officers to rebuild a community, and to reweave
2 the fabric of community around the children and
3 the families at risk in this city that I have
4 grown to love. Let us make sure that we do it
5 in a comprehensive way.

6 (Applause)

7 Third, let us remember that the great
8 advocates of the world, the great trial lawyers
9 of the world are clearly those that protect and
10 defend us every step of the way. But let's not
11 wait to resolve all our problems in the courts.

12 Let us develop community efforts that
13 help that lady get the landlord to fix the
14 toilet before she had to take him to court.

15 Let us work together to figure out how to keep
16 that young man out of trouble at eleven before
17 he gets into trouble, and we have to be his
18 guardian ad litem at 12. Let us work together
19 to solve problems, not just to win law suits.

20 (Applause)

21 Lawyers are known as the great
22 litigators, the great battlers. When I went to

1 Harvard Law School, Roger Fisher taught me

2 civil procedure. I never heard of Roger Fisher

3 in negotiation or getting the yes for a long
4 time after that.

5 But now I see lawyers across this
6 country doing wonderful things, in terms of
7 resolving disputes without conflicts, and even
8 before they get to court. Let us take that
9 talent to communities, to schools, to
10 elementary schools in this district, to middle
11 schools, the high schools.

12 There are wonderful young students
13 out there teaching their peers how to resolve
14 conflicts without knives, and guns, and fists,
15 teaching their peers how to resolve problems,
16 teaching their peers how to have self-respect,
17 teaching their peers how to honor each other
18 regardless of diversity, and their ethnic and
19 racial background.

20 Let us go out and enforce those
21 skills by learning to listen to young people.
22 I go to public schools on the average of once a

1 week now. These young people have tremendous
2 ideas. I was telling Judge Hamilton of one who
3 said, "What can I do to make a difference?"

4 "What can you do to make a difference?"

5 Learn how to listen to us.

6 Learn how to understand how difficult
7 it is to grow up, and how much we want to
8 contribute. Let us go out and use our
9 problem-solving skills, our mediation skills,
10 our negotiation skills to teach our young
11 people how to resolve conflicts without knives,
12 and guns, and fists.

13 And fifth, let us never cease, ever,
14 in all our efforts as lawyers to protect
15 against injustice, to protect the innocent.

16 For as long as I live, no matter what
17 I do, I will always remember the case of James
18 Joseph Richardson, a man who had been
19 prosecuted, convicted, and sentenced to death
20 for the poisoning death of his seven children
21 21 years before.

1 reinvestigate the case in another part of the
2 state. I stood in a courtroom in Arcadia,
3 Florida, and told the court that the evidence
4 was insufficient, and that he probably did not
5 commit the crime, and that he should go free.

6 And as I turned, and left that
7 courtroom, and watched that man walk out of the
8 courtroom for the first time in 21 years, I was
9 reminded that all of us as lawyers have a
10 sacred obligation to uphold the rule of law, to
11 protect the innocent, the speak out against
12 hatred, to speak out against bias, to speak out
13 against those who discriminate, and to lead
14 this world into a time of peace and
15 understanding.

16 Some people say it's too big a job.
17 But I watch the people in this room. I watch
18 what so many of you have done. I watch what is
19 happening around this country. And never have

20 I believed so devoutly in this nation and it's
21 capacity to solve its problem and make all
22 people free.

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1 Thank you so much.

2 (Applause)

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