



REMARKS OF ATTORNEY GENERAL JANET RENO

Federal Bar Association

New National Headquarters Dedication

Washington, D.C.

Thursday, March 25, 1999

10:00 A.M

I am greatly honored to be here with you to help you celebrate the dedication of the Federal Bar Association's wonderful new facility. I am a great believer in this organization and its mission. And I'm no disinterested bystander. As former Solicitor General Drew Days noted when he spoke to you a few years ago - on the occasion of your 75th anniversary - the Department of Justice is the "federal court's biggest customer." Every day all across the country, hundreds of lawyers stand up in federal court to tell the court their names, followed by "for the United States." And attorneys representing non-governmental parties - individuals and other private or public interests - appear in federal court to press the rights of their clients, often with the Department of Justice appearing on the other side.

The significance of this occasion comes home to me when I think about where we were the last time the Federal Bar Association dedicated a building in Washington in 1962. Of course, Robert Kennedy was the Attorney General, and he spoke at the dedication ceremony on January 17, at 5:00 p. m. Chief Justice Warren delivered the dedicatory address to

an audience that was huddled in their seats trying to stay warm in freezing temperatures and high winds.

As for me, I was still in my second year of law school, a member of the 10th class of women to graduate from Harvard Law School.

I also think about what the legal landscape looked like to a federal practitioner in 1962 and just how far we've come. Yes, Brown v. Board of Education had been decided eight years earlier, opening up the schoolhouse doors to desegregation. And, in 1962, the same year that the Federal Bar Association opened the doors of its new building, Baker v. Carr opened the voting booth to millions of Americans who had been denied a voice in our democracy. But there was no Gideon v. Wainwright, establishing that every defendant, rich or poor, has the right to be represented by a lawyer when charged with a serious crime. Jim Crow was still two years away from being dealt a fatal blow with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. And no one had to think about complying with the Americans with Disabilities Act in designing and building your former headquarters.

Our legal system and society are so intertwined that progress in one can hardly exist without progress in the other. When I was a teenager in the late 1950's people told me a woman couldn't go to law school. When I graduated in 1963, people told me a woman couldn't get a lawyer's job, and we know from the experiences of Anne Bingaman, the former Assistant Attorney General for the Antitrust Division, and Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, that many of our best and brightest couldn't and didn't at the outset of their careers. But now, three decades later, no one ever told me a woman couldn't be Attorney General.

The last 37 years have seen tremendous progress for our society and for the law, and the federal bar - and the federal courts - have played an important role in bringing this about. What will be the role of the federal practitioner in the twenty-first century? The only thing we know for sure is that it is going to change. Our Constitution has changed little, but our world is changing

every minute. Challenges that were once local are now international. How can we live together in peace, freedom, and prosperity? How is technology going to make things easier and more difficult? And what about the stubborn, age-old, and increasingly complex social problems of crime and civil injustice? How can lawyers who practice before the federal courts help society to take on these challenges? As you move into your new building on the eve of a new century, our legal system is confronting problems that I believe will redefine what it means to be an attorney, an agency general council, or a law firm litigator.

There is no single strategy that will prepare us for the twenty-first century, no one-size-fits-all approach that will help lawyers to magically dissolve these challenges. To understand how the role of federal practitioners will change, we need to look at what they are doing today. There's no better place to get a "snapshot" of the federal practitioner than by walking the halls of the Department of Justice. (This is a bit more difficult than in the past, because, as you may know, many of the halls of Main Justice are closed and under construction as we refurbish and renovate our building for the twenty-first century).

When you look at all of the marvelous work that the Justice Department lawyers are doing today on an extraordinary array of issues, you begin to appreciate that federal practitioners do a lot more than appear in court to try cases or argue summary judgement motions and appeals. As I look around the Department of Justice - despite an incredible diversity of backgrounds, expertise, and interests - I see three qualities over and over again in our lawyers- their willingness to develop partnerships with their counterparts and colleagues at all levels of government and in communities; their desire to be problem solvers, and their dedication to doing justice. We must change with the times. And the more we can incorporate these qualities into the work that we do as federal practitioners, the greater that the chance that we will make a real difference by doing justice.

How will the federal practitioner put what I am talking about into practice? Let me give you some examples of what

Justice Department lawyers have been doing.

I will start with partnerships. As you know, I came to Washington from the Dade County, Florida prosecutors office. While my perspective and role in the legal system are much different from the 5th floor of the Department of Justice than it was from the State Attorney's office in Miami, I still spend my time on many of the same problems - how to make our streets and communities safe, how to enforce the law firmly and fairly, and how to make the system work better for all stakeholders. These issues do not divide cleanly into federal issues and state issues. On the contrary, they cover every part of the criminal justice system. If we are going to address these issues, we have to have to work together by building on our successes in partnership with our state and local counterparts.

Take, for instance, the issue of gun violence. Since 1992, there has been a historic reduction in violent crime. Violent crimes committed with firearms have fallen by 27%. Despite this very good news, we are still one of the most violent "civilized" nations in the world, as more than 14,000 people were murdered with guns in our nation in 1997.

Our most effective strategies to date - and our model for the future - are coordinated efforts in which federal prosecutors team up with their counterparts at other federal agencies, in state and local law enforcement, to determine how best to reduce gun violence. In some places, like Richmond, Virginia, the U.S. Attorney's office joined with local law enforcement to establish an aggressive program to prosecute gun cases in federal court, called Project Exile. Since its establishment, Project Exile, in combination with other coordinated law enforcement efforts, has reduced Richmond's gun homicide rate by 30 % in the past year.

In Boston, the U.S. Attorney's office has played a major role in Operation Cease-Fire, a gun violence reduction program that involves unprecedented levels of collaboration between federal, state and federal prosecutions, as well as a concerted effort by federal prosecutors to work with the

community organizations, residents, and local leaders in the communities, to take a pro-active approach to gun violence and crime. Through this partnership, Department of Justice Attorneys have helped to bring about a 64% drop in Boston's homicide rate in a three-year period.

Lawyers can lead the way in responding to endemic social problems like gun violence - whether they are prosecutors or partners or working at the federal, state or local levels - if they work together to develop creative solutions. Regardless of where you work, you can participate in community partnerships to develop comprehensive community justice and prevention programs.

Next, I want to tell you how Justice Department lawyers have become problem-solvers. I know that at the Department of Justice, we call ourselves that nation's litigator. And day-in-and-day-out Justice Department lawyers go into court to try cases. Without vigorous advocates who are unafraid to try cases, we're not going to be very good at resolving disputes.

But we have to be able to do more than win cases. Lawyers today - including Department of Justice lawyers, cannot function in ways that are isolated from everyday experience of the people in dynamic situations.

Problem solving at the Department of Justice emphasizes creative thinking at all stages of a dispute. It means identifying risk, assessing the true value of a dispute, and working collaboratively with others to negotiate a swift and comprehensive resolution. Problem solving means t