



# Department of Justice

---

A PROSECUTOR'S PROSECUTOR: A TRIBUTE TO HENRY WADE

U.S. DEPARTMENT

SEP 18 1986

OF JUSTICE BY

THE HONORABLE EDWIN MEESE III  
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES

7:30 P.M.  
THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 11, 1986  
LOEW'S ANATOLE HOTEL  
DALLAS, TEXAS

NOTE: Because Mr. Meese often speaks from notes, the speech as delivered may vary from this text. However, he stands behind this text as printed.

Henry Wade is not only a Texas legend -- and that's saying something in Texas, where everything is a little larger than life -- he's also an authentic American hero, a sort of Sam Houston for D.A.s across the country.

In thirty-six years of service, Henry Wade has re-defined the very meaning of "District Attorney". He's set a standard of service that may never be surpassed. And that's why you'll find in the audience tonight D.A.s from all across the country. They have flown in to say one thing: "Thank you, Henry Wade. You've made us proud to be District Attorneys."

But D.A.s are not the only ones who owe Henry a great debt. The quality of life in communities all across the nation depends heavily on the job our local prosecutors do. And Henry has given his life to making Dallas County a safe place to live and raise a family. The State of Texas owes Henry a big debt, too, for providing an honest, effective model for D.A.s from the Panhandle to the Rio Grande.

But Henry's legacy doesn't stop at the Dallas County or the Texas state line. No, Henry, all America owes you a Texas-sized "thank you" for your pioneering leadership and for your superb moral example. And tonight we're here to make a small down payment.

Now, I suppose everyone has his or her own particular tribute to pay to Henry. Doug Mulder, Henry's top assistant for many years, says Henry is not just one of the best but the best

trial lawyer he's ever seen. Rider Scott, Henry's current chief felony prosecutor, calls Henry a "no nonsense, no politics, professional law enforcement man." And, not long ago, a little paper back east that some people seem to set a lot of store in -- The New York Times -- called Henry a "law and order icon."

Well, for my part, I think the highest praise I can bestow on Henry -- and I think he'll understand this -- is to call him a prosecutor's prosecutor. Henry Wade is every inch of that.

Tonight I'd like to take a few minutes to reflect on what makes a good prosecutor and, more particularly, on what it is that makes Henry Wade a prosecutor's prosecutor.

So, what does it take?

Well, as I see it, there are three basic qualities: ability, integrity and courage. Henry has these in abundance.

What else does a good prosecutor need?

A tough hide, certainly. A sense of humor. A stout heart. Henry has all that -- and more.

And I suppose, really, it's that "and more" -- those unique personal qualities -- that has made Henry into a "living Texas legend." Henry's an incredible character with incredible character.

Yvonne, Henry's wife, tells a story that captures him well. One of Henry's sons, it seems, was dejected after losing an important game. Henry went up and put his arm around him. "You did the best you could," he said. "Now take a drink of water and call your next case." That expression, Henry's favorite, reflects his approach.

Of course, when all's said and done, what most people look for in a prosecutor is a good conviction record. And by that standard Henry has virtually no equal.

Of course, I'm reminded of Cy Young, the winningest pitcher in baseball, who was asked at age eighty what his favorite pitch was when the bases were loaded. "My boy," he told the young reporter, "I don't recall ever having to pitch with the bases full."

Over the years, Henry's handled some big cases. In 1964 he was thrust before the eyes of the world when he prosecuted the killer of President Kennedy's killer, Jack Ruby. His courtroom opponent, who carried a red velour briefcase, called him a "country bumpkin." But when it was all over Henry had clearly won the case while enhancing his own reputation and the public respect for the processes of justice.

Of course, success is a journey not a destination. And over years, Henry has confirmed again and again his reputation as a courtroom wizard, dispatching, among others, Ben Jack Cage, Guzman-Lopes, and the Ransonette brothers to prison, and obtaining the death penalty 29 times out of thirty against vicious criminals.

What was the key to Henry's victories? Well, probably many things, but Henry's greatest talent is sizing up people. He can read a person like a book. If you could bottle his jury magic, trial lawyers would buy it by the case.

For example, in the Amanda Dealy kidnapping case, Henry asked for a sentence of 5000 years. At the time, some judges and parole boards were being very lenient. The jury returned a verdict of 5,005 years -- the largest sentence ever handed down.

And then there was the capital murder case in which Henry's assistants wanted to strike an odd little man for fear that his off-brand religion would keep him from voting for the death penalty. Henry kept him anyway.

The trial started, and on cross-examination the defendant denied his complicity in the murder. Suddenly from the jury came a voice. "Henry, he's lying." It was the little man.

Well, Henry won a conviction and the death penalty. And the very next day after the trial the same little man saw Henry on the street and stopped him: "Henry, have they killed him yet?"

And Henry said, "No, not yet. Why?"

The little man answered, "I wanted to go see him to try and save his soul."

A good prosecutor is also known by the office he runs. And behind every good D.A. is a good staff. As Henry puts it, the key to success is "who you hire and who you fire." And Henry has the ability to recognize ability. He hires the best, fresh from law school, and throws them in head first -- they either make it or they don't.

And, by the way, you can always tell an old hand from a new recruit. Experienced prosecutors sit on the right side of Henry's desk. His spittoon is on the left.

Although Henry has outfitted his office with the latest technology to help manage the huge case load -- some 60,000 cases each year -- when it comes to the actual disposition of cases, for Henry there's only one way, the old-fashioned way -- you try them to a jury. The criminal justice system works best that way, and besides, in Henry's book, if you're not trying cases, you just ain't working.

There's another thing about Henry. As his friend Tom Unis says, "Henry likes to win. He likes to win elections" -- he's only lost one ever -- "he likes to win cases, and he likes to win at dominoes."

Of course, Henry likes winning at golf most of all. He's the only person I know with a "scratch" handicap who has never broken 100. Henry believes everybody should be able to improve his lie. But he's got one club in his bag that others don't have. It's called a "foot wedge." It's helpful when his ball is in the rough or behind a tree. And when you're ahead a stroke, Henry can always find something important to discuss in the middle of your backswing. But I will say this about Henry, he's a perfectionist. If he doesn't like a shot, he'll drop another ball until he hits one he likes.

Now, Henry has tooled his office into a crime-fighting juggernaut, a prosecutorial Sherman tank, with one of the lowest acquittal rates in the country.

Of course, since the days of Judge Roy Bean, enforcing the law in Texas has been a challenge. And it's not necessarily getting any easier. Since Henry first took office in 1950, Dallas has grown into a major city and a magnet for criminals as well as the law-abiding.

But Henry and his men -- now some 195 compared to forty when he started -- are ready for them. And one of Henry's biggest successes has been keeping organized crime out of Dallas. As any U.S. Attorney will tell you, that is no mean feat.

But as impressive as Henry's enforcement record is, to my mind, two things have made Henry more than just a good prosecutor.

First, very simply, he has endured. In a profession where two terms are unusual and a third term fatal, Henry has lasted thirty-six years. He has, quite simply, stood the test of time. So well, in fact, that in his last election, which he won with 79 percent of the vote, a community newspaper gave him this endorsement: "Henry Wade is like God: he's been there too long and done too good a job not to keep him."

Second, Henry has maintained absolute integrity through it all. And I suspect that's the key to his longevity.

As Cappy Eads has remarked -- and he should know -- "Being a D.A. is a high profile, high pressure job, where the saying has never been truer that friends come and go while enemies accumulate. If Henry didn't call the shots right, and let the devil take the hindmost, he wouldn't still be in office."

With Henry at the helm, there hasn't been a scandal in the Dallas D.A.'s office in 36 years. That's not just cowboy luck. The credit belongs to Henry Wade.

And Henry has kept an eagle eye on the rest of the criminal justice system. He hasn't been afraid, when necessary, to pull police, judges and other officials back into line.

A quick glance at your program will tell you that Henry has kept his office above party politics. It is significant that the co-chairmen of this dinner tonight are the County Chairmen of both political parties.

In many ways it all comes down to this -- Henry has respected his office, and the members of his profession, and the public, have returned complete respect.

Dallas's current Bar president, Vince Perini, has put it well: "Henry Wade makes it possible for honest men to be criminal lawyers ... because he plays ... by the rules."

Henry has made being a prosecutor not only his career, but a high calling. Before many D.A.s put in their first day, they are already contemplating the next step in their careers. But Henry has made being a D.A. a premier professional accomplishment, not merely a stepping stone.

He might easily have been a governor or a U.S. Senator or a judge. In fact, after the Ruby case, President Lyndon Johnson called Henry to ask him to become the next director of the FBI. Henry said he'd consider it -- if they would move the FBI to Dallas.

So Henry remained a prosecutor. But many of the graduates of the Henry Wade School of Hammer-and-Tong Prosecution went on to become his living legacy. Among them are many of the major criminal defense lawyers in Dallas, nine out of 14 current criminal district judges, and six of ten county criminal court judges, five former presidents of the Texas State Bar, a current member of your state supreme court, and your current state attorney general.

Henry's commitment to his job has permitted the D.A.'s office to attain an unusual degree of continuity and stability. Prosecutors sign on for five years instead of two or three. And several of Henry's top assistants -- prize catches anywhere -- have stayed ten years or longer. Henry has even had two generations in one family, a father and a son, work for him.

Now, being a prosecutor is a job in which it's better to be respected than to be liked. Somehow Henry's managed both. He's probably the most popular man in Dallas County and, perhaps as a result, also the most powerful. But he never abuses his power.

He's tough, but he's fair. It's been said that laws are like spider webs through which the big flies pass and the little ones get caught. But with Henry everybody gets the same deal -- including his own family. The story of how Henry made his own brother part of the Wade Parade of DWI defendants has been told so many times that I won't tell it again.

But there's another you may not know. I'm told that back in the early '70s, when Rider Scott was still prosecuting misdemeanors, he got the charge sheet for one William Nelson.

The offenses were DWI and carrying a pistol. The standard penalties were 30 days, one year probation, and a \$150 fine for the DWI, and one day and \$150 for the pistol.

Clipped to the folder was a note that has struck fear in the hearts of many an assistant D.A. -- "See me. H.W."

Well, Rider went to Henry's -- "Mr. Wade's" -- office. And from behind his desk, Henry, an unlit cigar tucked in the corner of his mouth, asked, "You know the defendant, here?" And there in his Wrangler blue jeans sat the one and only Willie Nelson.

"Yessir," said Rider.

Henry turned to the country music superstar and said: "Mr. Nelson, this fellow here is one of the toughest prosecutors in my office. And he wants to send you to prison. And, he'll do it. Now, I don't know whether my intervening on your behalf will help, but I'll ask him."

"Mr. Scott, do you think that maybe in this case a probation and a fine would be proper? Say 30 days, with a year's probation and a \$150 fine, and one day and \$150 for the pistol."

Rider agreed and Willie left, relieved. Of course, ol' Willie didn't know it, but he'd gotten the same penalty that everyone else gets.

And that's Henry Wade's stock in trade. He listens politely to what you have to say and leaves you thinking he's done you a favor, but he always, always enforces the law.

Henry not only runs a tight ship in Dallas County, he's been a pioneer in his profession, a leader. In 36 years, there's not much Henry hasn't seen -- or endured. As a result, a lot of his

colleagues, whose egos would not permit them to turn elsewhere when they have a problem, go to Henry, almost if as to a patriarch. As a fellow D.A. says of Henry, "As powerful, as indestructible, as terrifying as he can be, he's always open to anyone seeking his help."

That applies to the public at large, as well. If you're willing to wait your turn in line, it doesn't matter who you are, or what you may have on your mind, you can walk right in and talk to Henry. His openness and fairness may explain why he's well liked by all parts of the Dallas community, rich and poor, black and white.

Henry has also been an innovator. He was, for example, among the first to create special divisions for the prosecution of career criminals and white collar crime, and to give assistance to victims and witnesses. And prosecutors from across the country study and imitate crime-fighting techniques developed here in Dallas. Henry has also pushed for the enactment of sound criminal justice legislation, often lending his top assistants to the effort. Bringing multiple homicide within state death penalty provisions is one recent example.

Henry believes, as I and most Americans do, in the responsibility of every individual for his or her own actions, and in the effectiveness of punishment -- including capital punishment. For there are times when the death penalty is simply the only moral and effective response.

A good prosecutor will also be a community leader. Henry has long been active in a variety of civic activities, like the Dallas Business Alliance and the Lions Club. Beneath his hard-driving, cigar-chewing exterior, there is compassion. His sense of duty to the law-abiding is rounded out by concern for the prodigal -- such as the chronically unemployed and ex-cons adjusting to life after prison.

With his wife Yvonne, Henry has raised five fine children. Two are carrying on the Wade family tradition as lawyers. And I understand that another may soon do the same.

A good prosecutor, who is also a a good man, must have his priorities in order. And, obviously, Henry does. Nothing means more to him than his family, his farm and his office -- in that order.

Tonight, we have gathered to honor Henry. So long and illustrious a career is not easily summed up. But, ironically, one of the more notable tributes comes from a past political opponent, who said: "I think they ought to take the new courthouse they're going to build and name it after Henry Wade. He more than anybody has left an imprint on the criminal justice system.... When people review the history of Dallas County 100 years from now his name is going to stand out and shine." Well, that's certain.

God bless you, Henry, and thank you all.