



# Department of Justice

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ADDRESS

OF

THE HONORABLE EDWIN MEESE III  
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES

BEFORE

THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE LEGAL FOUNDATION

LOS ANGELES , CALIFORNIA

SEPTEMBER 26 , 1985

Thank you, Dr. Prouty, and thank you, ladies and gentlemen, for your very warm welcome. It's a great pleasure for me to be here. It's always good to be back in Oakland. I've particularly enjoyed the privilege of seeing so many old friends here this evening. I am also, along with the rest of my family, grateful to the Oakland/South Alameda County Chapter of the Red Cross for the honor that's been done to my father, as my mother mentioned earlier this evening.

I want to thank Burt for that marvelous introduction. Maybe I ought to quit while I'm ahead. But in any event, I'm very grateful to you for being here and for that fine introduction.

It is particularly gratifying to be here tonight and to celebrate the efforts of what amounts to well over 1,280 volunteers of this organization, this chapter of the American Red Cross. The selfless contribution of the time and the talents of the people who are part of the Red Cross in this area make our community a far better place to live.

It's interesting to note all of the things that are accomplished in the course of a year by this chapter of the Red Cross. For example, the Red Cross provides over 12,000 classes in essential public programs. They vary from disaster relief and first aid training, to CPR, which is so important now in saving lives, to boating safety, and commercial and industrial first aid training. All of these things, of course, bring a much needed list of services to the community and your fellow citizens. But none of these would be possible were it not for the volunteers --

not just the three that have been honored tonight -- but all of the volunteers to whom this dinner is a particular tribute.

As was mentioned in President Dick Shubert's letter, and he's a good friend of mine -- I know him well, and he's an outstanding man to head up the American Red Cross -- events such as have taken place recently in Mexico bring to mind very dramatically the fact that in every major emergency and every disaster, the Red Cross is there.

Whether it's a relatively small situation, such as a first aid class, which only affects a few people, or whether it's a major disaster such as in Mexico, the important thing is that lives are being saved and people are being aided because of the work of the Red Cross.

That's the reason that it is a particular honor for me to be here to join you this evening, and to join these committed volunteers: because volunteers are the heart of the Red Cross.

Look at the three people whom we honor tonight:

Mayor Alex Giuliani -- His career as a police officer was distinguished by tremendous acts of compassion and care. Equally impressive to me, however, was the fact that he was so humble in accepting the award, and that the most important thing to him was to have participated in saving those lives.

Mrs. Diane Greer Mason is a personal friend. It's true that she has been a volunteer for the Red Cross for 70

years, at least according to the records. This is a truly astonishing record of public service. But I know her personally, because she also served on the grand jury of Alameda County during one of the years that I was privileged to be its legal advisor. And there, again, she exhibited the same qualities that she brought to her Red Cross work, another volunteer act on behalf of her community.

And as my mother mentioned, the Red Cross meant a great deal to my dad. One of my memories of him was the fact that we had a flood in southern Alameda County. We don't get floods there very often, but we had one several years ago. And I remember my dad spending a good part of Christmas Day down there, because he happened to be chairman of the Red Cross Chapter that year, assisting the citizens of that area in that particular flood.

Well, in one sense, the individuals we honor here this evening are special; they are unique. But, in another sense, they are not at all different from all of you who devote yourselves to this noble cause. You are all to be commended for your outstanding efforts; for you set the standard of what volunteerism is all about.

There has never been, I think it is safe to say, any organization that equals the record of the Red Cross in terms of volunteer service. Since Clara Barton brought Henri Dunant's

ideas to our country in 1881, as was mentioned earlier, the American Red Cross has led the way in bringing Americans together in voluntary associations like this chapter to help their fellowmen. These contributions have never gone unnoticed and certainly, they have never gone unappreciated.

But in a sense, the American Red Cross is more than an institution that is devoted to good works. It is, at a deeper level, a symbol of what the American people are capable of doing on their own. The Red Cross personifies the great humanitarian impulse which is represented by voluntarism and charitable organizations that works best through private groups.

In fact, the Red Cross is the epitome of the same spirit of voluntarism and community effort that has been a central part of the new public philosophy which President Reagan has been emphasizing during the past four and a half years, as he has encouraged what he calls private sector initiatives. Now I say "new," but, in fact, the President's philosophy is not so much an innovation as it is an effort to recover that spirit of voluntary participation which has made our country what it is: a country that is strong, a country that is free, and a country that is benevolent.

As President Reagan himself has said, "Nobody in our Administration thinks we invented volunteerism." But we have tried to foster and encourage a revitalization of voluntary solutions whenever possible.

The focus of the President's attention and his vision of what our country can become has been an America as it was and as

it can be again. The kind of America that is represented by the American Red Cross. Perhaps more than any President in recent history, Ronald Reagan has publicly espoused his faith in the American people to do for themselves and for each other without calling upon governmental programs. This is a belief that inspired the Founders of our great republic to undertake this "novel experiment" in free government that has proved so successful.

The President describes it this way: he said, "From the foundation of our Republic to the taming of the frontier, right up to modern times, volunteerism, the idea of neighbor helping neighbor, has been one of the distinguishing marks of the American experience and one of the primary causes of our nation's greatness."

Sometimes, to really understand our country, it pays to see what people think of us from other parts of the world. To really understand how unique this idea of voluntarism is, it might be good to look at the observations of a stranger to our shores. In the early part of the 19th Century, a Frenchman by the name of Alexis de Tocqueville came to this country and was amazed by what he found here.

Being used to the heavily bureaucratic ways of central Europe, he was astounded to find that in America there was a different spirit. Where there was a problem, he wrote in his book, Democracy in America, "pretty soon, without any government involvement whatsoever, a committee was formed or a group was gathered. The problem was solved, the needs were met, and then

the people went back to their own pursuits." He was amazed that all this could be done without the organizing influence of government and the fact that people willingly devoted their own time and energy to helping their neighbors.

Well, what he discovered was something that was well illustrated by the founders of the republic. They had seen citizens come together like that, first of all, to free our nation and to make it the republic that it became. These founders believed that it was the spirit of public virtue that would generate that most important quality of a good society: the sense of belonging to a community.

This fact was important to the founding generation, because it would enable people to keep government to a minimum. The founding generation of sturdy individualists knew that there was always a danger in too much dependence on government. For whenever any government came to do something for you, it would be very hard to say no.

But the more government would do, the more power it would aggregate. And of course, in the end, the taxpayer would have to pay for the whole business. That is why it is so vitally important to democratic nations that the private sector be encouraged and allowed to be active. Local and state governments are not the only things necessary to hedge against a big, intrusive, bureaucratic national government. Private associations and voluntary organizations are especially necessary.

The animating sentiment of President Reagan's push to get government off the backs of the people is the belief that any government that attempts to do everything for a people will end up not doing anything very well. As de Tocqueville said, "central power, however enlightened and wise one imagines it to be, can never alone see to all the details of the life of a great nation. It cannot do so because such a task exceeds human strength."

But the issue is not simply that big government cannot do everything well; the deeper point is that people in their private capacity can do some things better. There is an energy in private pursuits government can never match. And there is also the happy fact that such a limited role for government leads to an enhanced role for voluntary participation. It is such participation that draws individuals together and knits them into communities.

Well, America has truly answered the President's call. It's interesting to note that the Gallup Poll found that in 1980, we had 84 million people 14 years of age and over who were engaged in volunteer work. By 1983, only three years later, that figure had risen to 92 million people, a jump of 8 million, and an increase of 9 1/2 percent. In 1980, charitable contributions in America totaled some \$49 billion. In 1984, the figure had risen to some \$74 billion, a 50 percent increase. It's noted that 91 percent of American corporations participate in community service, either through monetary contributions or some form of in-kind contributions.

But even more impressive than these statistics are the individual projects which make up this voluntarism in America. Now, there is no end to the kind of examples I could cite tonight of the kind of volunteer effort that makes this country great. But perhaps just mentioning a few will demonstrate the variety of activities and the imagination and the ingenuity that is demonstrated by our citizens.

For example, in one Arizona city, when a developer who had literally built a new city got into financial trouble and could no longer afford to maintain the public areas in the community, more than 400 retired men and women formed a group called the Sun City Prides. Today, they have assumed the responsibility for maintaining 14 square miles of the city, a volunteer effort that is estimated to be worth over half a million dollars each year.

We in California know very well how the citizens of Los Angeles and the surrounding communities responded when the city put in a bid for the 1984 Olympic Games. Rather than spend tax dollars to support the event, the planning committee established a Volunteer Services Office which itself was run by over a thousand volunteers. That office, in turn, coordinated the efforts of more than 30,000 volunteers, who contributed an estimated 1,192,000 hours of service, and whose efforts made the Olympics such a great success. A great tribute to Los Angeles, to California, and to our whole nation.

There are many examples of corporations that have donated many things. For example, out in Northbrook, Illinois, an outstanding example is given by the Allstate Insurance Company,

which loans executives to community groups for anywhere from six weeks to a full year, to help with the projects in that community. The salaries are all paid by the corporation, but the people work in these volunteer organizations. They also provide in-kind help to these groups, such as furniture, printing help, the kinds of things any organization needs in order to expand and carry on its activities. They provide financial assistance. All because they feel that a corporation, far beyond its economic life, also has a role to play in the life of the community.

It's interesting to note also that it doesn't take a large corporation to make an impact. One individual can make a big difference.

In Rhode Island, there is a college professor who, when he's not teaching at Southeastern Massachusetts University, does his own research and experimentation, and develops and provides state of the art communications apparatus for several severely handicapped non-vocal individuals -- people who are unable to talk in the normal way. He raises the funds to support this effort himself. So far, he's provided equipment to 25 people, and is in the process of developing apparatus for another 20. Thus, forty-five individuals who would otherwise not be able to communicate are able to do so simply because one man cared and used his inventive genius to help them.

Well, the last example I want to cite to you brings us back again to our own Red Cross. In Washington, D.C., where we don't always find groups interested in doing for themselves what they think the government might do for them instead, two groups that

have their headquarters in the nation's capital have formed a Disaster Coastline Project.

In this effort, the AFL-CIO and the American Red Cross cooperate to ensure that help can be provided to victims of natural disasters, particularly hurricanes, tornadoes and similar types of events. The AFL-CIO offered the Red Cross the use of its union halls from Richmond, Virginia to Brownsville, Texas, all along the coastline. Then at a cost to the labor federation of \$10 million, they remodeled these halls to adapt them to the needs of the Red Cross. Recently, for example, the hall in Jackson, Mississippi was used twice in a single six-week period to shelter people forced from their homes by severe flooding.

Aside from the benefits to the recipients themselves, and to the community that is served, we enjoy another benefit that isn't always recognized. The American people realize that the magic, and most enduring value of volunteer efforts like the Red Cross is the enrichment of the giver as well as the recipient. A recent Gallup poll found that 85% of our people believe that "even if there is enough money to pay people to provide services, it is still important for the community life that a lot of useful work be done by volunteers."

Without concern for each other, there is a danger that we may come to view ourselves as little more than indistinguishable specks in the dull grey blur of modern society. There is a danger of coming to see mankind as nothing more than what de Tocqueville called "an innumerable multitude going forth without any like to each other." He said that there is the deeper danger

that we may each withdraw into ourselves, unless we help others, and become "almost unaware of the fate of the rest."

In contrast, what I think we would all agree we need is a confederation of robust voluntary organizations that refuse to yield the important public ground to government alone, a body of Americans who live by John Kennedy's challenge: "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country."

In our modern times, it is especially crucial that there be a force in society that draws people together. It is too easy to be isolated in our private homes, pursuing our individual interests. We must avoid the tendency to treasure our individual pursuits or to maintain our own interests to such an extent that we preclude the opportunity for community effort.

For many of us, one of the things that has happened in our own lifetime is that such things as the television set and changes in people's recreation patterns have largely supplanted some of the activities that used to be so important, such as lodges, and other types of organizations. But it's important that there be associations and organizations that continue to perform that function of bringing people together. We need associations, such as the Red Cross, that carry on this business of bringing folks together in pursuit of noble public purposes. They do more to make the spirit of democracy work than any institution of government could ever hope to do.

Voluntarism holds a lofty position in our social and political history precisely because it ennobles the spirit of the

individual while at the same time serving the public good. It brings out the best in human beings; and it moves our society along.

As the President has said on one occasion when he addressed some dedicated volunteers like those that we are honoring this evening, not just here on the platform, but in the audience, "You have made a difference, for your country and for millions of your countrymen as you have helped renew and enrich America by awakening one of her oldest and most noble traditions."

It is therefore a great honor for me to participate in this first annual Volunteer Tribute Dinner. I extend my congratulations to the Red Cross, to this chapter, and to all the volunteers. I certainly hope that these tribute dinners will continue, because I know as you do that the work of the American Red Cross will always be needed. Thank you.