

U.S. ATTORNEY LAWRENCE KEEFE'S REMARKS
INVESTITURE CEREMONY
U.S. COURTHOUSE, NORTHERN DISTRICT OF FLORIDA
TALLAHASSEE, FL
4.12.2019

To the members of the federal and state judiciary,

To the sworn law enforcement officers from every level – federal, state, and local,

To those from the Congress, the Legislature, the Department of Defense, and to our Secretary of State and Mayor,

To my colleagues in the United States Attorney's Office and the Department of Justice,

To my former law partners and my dear friends,

Thank you all for being here today.

And most of all, thank you to my family. My wife of 31 years, Lynn, and our sons Robby, John, and Patrick, who are all here with me today. And especially to our son and brother Max, who is on duty right now with the United States Secret Service and cannot be here.

Thank you all.

I have long been fascinated by the life and times of Winston Churchill. He brilliantly captured and elegantly expressed the meaning of complex and nuanced events. I want to share with you a Churchill quote, one that succinctly captures the way that I feel about this moment.

“To each there comes in their lifetime a special moment when they are figuratively tapped on the shoulder and offered the chance to do a very special thing that is unique to them and fitted to their talents. What a tragedy if that moment finds them unprepared or unqualified for that which could have been their finest hour.”

I am humbled to be here today for this figurative “tap on the shoulder.”

I hope you will find me prepared and qualified for this special moment though not because of anything I have done alone.

If my time as the U.S. Attorney is to be my finest hour, it will be only because I have been blessed with opportunities – again and again – to live and work in the company of great people.

Many of those people are here today.

A special thanks to my mentor and friend, Ben Hill for his kind words today about my family and me. Ben took a chance and hired me 34 years ago. At Ben's firm, I learned to practice law his way to his high standards.

The lessons that I learned from watching Ben extended well beyond the daily practice of law. I watched how Ben treated people. No matter their station in life, Ben treated everyone with respect.

He treated his legal adversaries with honor and decency. He adored his wife and sons, and he masterfully balanced his duties to his clients with his role as a father and husband. He brought integrity and higher purpose to every decision, no matter how monumental or mundane.

Thank you, Ben, for your extraordinary example.

I will now say some things that I strongly believe ought to and must be said about the other people assembled here today:

First, to the members of the federal judiciary:

I want to publicly share with you now a few of my core beliefs about the role of the federal courts.

I believe that the federal courts have the final say on how the Constitution and how the law will be applied in any case or controversy.

I believe that the federal courts will ultimately sort things out and make sense of things where there is conflict within or between the other branches of our government.

I believe that one of my most important duties as United States Attorney is to do all I can every day and in every way to foster respect for the federal courts.

The best and most spontaneous oral description of the role of the federal courts that I have ever heard was spoken 20 years ago by a federal judge right here in this District.

That description was spoken in a federal courtroom at the conclusion of a long trial.

To quote that judge:

“We in the Judicial Branch don't raise money, and we don't have armies. We don't have all of the things they do in the Executive and Legislative Branches. We have to use our authority sparingly.”

“I think, if you go back and track the history of this country, the federal courts have been very good about doing that.”

“But when pushed, the Courts have been up to the task, whether it was by a President or a governor at the school house door or any of a number of others.”

“I don’t have any desire to enforce any injunctions or take any unnecessary steps. I’d like to use my authority very sparingly.”

“But I come to this place with a great deal of respect and belief in the role that the federal courts have had to play from time to time in this country, and I will do my level best to see that the standing and authority of the federal courts are not diminished on my watch.”

“If I have to enforce an injunction, I am going to do it. I don’t know if an injunction is going to be issued in this case. I’m going to look at these issues. But if it does, do not be back here having violated it.”

That federal judge did issue the injunction.

The opposing party violated it.

The judge later found that party guilty of criminal contempt and punished him.

That decisive judicial action sent a strong message throughout the entire District about the Rule of Law and the crucial role of the federal courts.

That Judge was Judge Robert Hinkle in whose courtroom I now stand 20 years later as the United States Attorney.

To our federal law enforcement officers:

From the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the Internal Revenue Service to the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives,

From the United States Postal Service and the Drug Enforcement Administration to the Department of Homeland Security and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service,

From the Department of Health and Human Services to the Office of Special Investigations and the United States Secret Service,

I will now say here publicly what I have told you privately over the past few months:

You directly serve and support the people. We in the U.S. Attorney’s Office serve and support you.

During my term in this office, I will remain readily available to you – 24/7 ... 365.

My colleagues in the U.S. Attorney's Office are empowered to make decisions with you "in the field" and "on the front lines" where law enforcement actually happens.

We will zealously present your cases to this federal court, but we shall act as a necessary "check and balance" on each other to be sure that in our zeal, we never overreach.

To our state and local law enforcement officers, who represent approximately 85 percent of all law enforcement in this country:

You are the backbone of all law enforcement. We are honored to be your partners, and we cannot do our jobs without you.

Some of you are directly elected by the people. That is a very special status that makes you directly accountable to the citizens.

The profound skill and amazing technical capabilities of federal law enforcement are here to support you and the citizens that you serve in your communities.

This is the cooperative and respectful attitude that you can expect from the U.S. Attorney's Office on my watch.

Finally, to my new work family in the United States Attorney's Office:

We, you and I, are here to be loyal to the Constitution and the cause of justice by always doing the right thing, the right way, for the right reasons in every case.

We will treat our legal adversaries with fairness, dignity, and respect.

We will have our finest hours together in the U.S. Attorney's Office if we constantly challenge each other in each case and in every decision with that very question:

Are we doing the right thing, the right way, for the right reasons?

Thank you all for being here and for being part of one of the most special days of my life.

I look forward to working with each and every one of you.

Judge Walker, if it pleases the Court, I respectfully request that this proceeding be adjourned.

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