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Remarks of the Honorable Janet Reno

Janet Reno

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REMARKS OF THE HONORABLE JANET RENO*

October 1, 1994

It is such a great honor to be here with you today to dedicate this magnificent building and the spirit that I already sense, as I have spent just a brief time in it, of faculty, administrators, board of trustees, and people who care so deeply about this great university and about this wonderful law school.

It is important that we dedicate this building. But it is more important that we dedicate ourselves to what this building should stand for, dedicate ourselves to what the law should be about; and to the faculty, to the administrators, I ask you to dedicate yourself to what you have done so wonderfully so far.

There are many wonderful lawyers, some of whom you have sent my way when I was a prosecutor in Miami and recruited from Catholic University. They are wonderful and caring lawyers, and I cannot tell you how much your influence has meant to them, for I have some sense of it. I entered Harvard Law School in 1960. There were sixteen women out of a class of 544. People wondered why ladies wanted to be lawyers. The Dean at Harvard Law School was instrumental in making us feel at home. He has kept in touch with me for the rest of my professional career and still to this day will stop and call. Irwin Griswald is very special. In our first year, he explained to us that he had admitted women to law school because he did not want Harvard Law School accused of inequality, but he did not know what we were going to do with our legal educations.

Thus, the students here have a special responsibility to take the wonderful opportunity that the administrators and the faculty have provided and to use this legal education, this magnificent experience that you have underway now, in your community, for your nation, for this world, to make it a safer, more peaceful nation.

And to the lawyers, it has been my wonderful opportunity to meet so many incredibly splendid lawyers throughout this nation and in this city, lawyers who care so deeply about their community and their nation. Let

* Janet Reno was sworn in as the nation's 78th Attorney General by President Clinton on March 12, 1993.

us, by the dedication of this building today, dedicate ourselves further to what the law should be about.

We must go further beyond the physical structure of this building because it is also a celebration of this institution's approach to legal education and training. The law school is committed to excellence. I have seen it. This institution is known for offering its student body an education that blends the best theoretical and pragmatic approaches to the law along with the development of professional skills with an eye toward moral responsibility.

It is extraordinary to see a young intern come from this law school to Dade County to have to practice law with overwhelming caseloads, find that young man having all the skills that he needs to go into the courtroom right off the bat, and go into the courtroom still questioning with each case that he takes what is the right thing to do. Thank you. You make such a difference throughout this land.

This law school is dedicated to instilling the virtues and values to which it believes lawyers in the legal system should aspire. We have heard what is chiseled on this building, words such as "compassion" and "charity." Let us make those words real for all Americans.

Today, too many children live in poverty, have no hope for the future, look to being cut down on our streets before they grow old. Let us give them the sense that the law is real, that there is equal opportunity, that the law can represent the children of America as well as the corporations of America.

Wisdom. We get so tied up in statutes and procedures and rules that we forget about what the law means in the whole course of human history. In the tradition of this nation and this world, let us put the law in perspective of mankind's history and understand through wisdom.

Learning. We can learn all the law we want, but it will not make too much difference if we do not understand medical problems, if we do not understand social issues, if we do not understand transportation issues that enable our clients to get across town to a pro bono legal service clinic that we have developed.

Let us start talking through this great university and throughout this nation in an interdisciplinary way that can make a difference. Public health nurses should be talking with lawyers and social workers and community activists as we bind the fabric of society around communities that have too often just disintegrated.

And community. Let us make the community real again. Too often, I have walked into a community where people want to do something, they want to be involved, but they are stopped every step of the way by laws

that are barriers rather than hope and opportunity. Too often, I have come to a meeting where a woman is on welfare wanting to get off welfare, wanting to make life better for her children, gets a job, loses benefits, and is worse off than if she had not gone to work in the first place. Let us make the law real for that lady. Let us make the law real for her children and for her neighborhood and a sense of community.

And truth and fidelity and honesty and conscience. Let us all dedicate ourselves today to saying that through our actions and by spreading the word, the people of America will come to understand that lawyers stand for honor. They stand for integrity, and they are trying to lead the way in this nation to give people a confidence in the law. These are the words chiseled on this building, but it is so important that we reach beyond the chiseled stone and make it real. I am very impressed by this institution's commitment to these values because we cannot lose sight of our purpose and our responsibilities. It is to remember the people.

On the east wing of the east side of the Justice Building on 9th Street, the following words are inscribed: "The common law is derived from the will of mankind, issuing from the people, framed by mutual confidence, sanctioned by the light of reason." By instilling these values of putting people first, this institution teaches its students to remember the people in the legal process, to remember the people in a democracy.

The law and lawyers cannot become indifferent to the people. We need to make the law more useful, more friendly, more accessible, more real to all of the people of America so that everyone can rely on it regardless of whether they are rich or poor, regardless of whether they are children or the elderly.

I know that here at this great law school you are committed to these principles. For example, through such successful clinical programs as the General Practice Program, the Advocacy for the Elderly Clinic, and Families and the Law Clinic, you are teaching your students to be advocates for people, all the people. I know that your Families and the Law Clinic has had a particular focus on domestic violence and that in addition to litigation, the students undertake policy work and develop community legal education programs.

Ladies and gentlemen, unless we learn to resolve the conflicts in our home and to end violence in our home, we are never going to end it in our schools and our streets and around the world. In the spring semester, a Victims of Gun Violence Clinic will be established here. Your clinic addressing the issue of gun violence is a good example of this institution's ability to address the pressing needs of its community.

In addition to the clinical programs, the Law and Public Policy Program exposes students to another type of advocacy. By participating in the legislative, nonprofit, and government arenas, students are given a comprehensive legal education. This can only strengthen their skills as attorneys. We cannot win all our battles in the courtroom. Too often, lawyers focus on the courtroom as the place to win, but the prosecutor who seeks a conviction and then does nothing to make sure that we follow up either with prison or appropriate rehabilitation does not win the battle. The public defender who sees a client get off on a motion to dismiss only to walk out of the courtroom and into a much worse prison of drug addiction without doing anything about it does not win the battle for his client. We have got to look beyond and through all sorts of public policy issues to make the law real for our clients.

The Columbus School of Law's goals in education extend beyond legal training. They also focus on making the students good citizens. Having your student association develop tutoring programs with grade schools in the community and being involved with global concerns of homelessness and hunger on a very local level clearly demonstrate that this legal institution does not lose sight of people in the process of training lawyers.

There is no question that theoretical and practical training is necessary in fostering good legal minds. The community service is essential to fostering effective advocates, lawyers that are bettering their community and having a positive impact on the people and the clients they represent.

I have had an opportunity to travel across this nation this past year and a half. I have met so many incredibly wonderful people who want to be involved, who want to see doors open, who want to make a difference in this nation. Lawyers leading the way, such as you have here at this great law school, can make that difference for so many people.

But in the process and as we use this building and as we pursue our professions and as we try to contribute to this nation, let us not forget the most precious possession of all: our families. Too often, lawyers have gotten too caught up in billable hours. Too often, people have gotten too caught up in designing institutions. Too often, lawyers have gotten too caught up in their practices, and too often, we forget our families.

I look at the young lawyers struggling to get breakfast on the table, the children off to school, the case tried, the witnesses interviewed for the next day, and home to start the process all over again, running errands on Saturdays, going to church on Sunday mornings, starting to prepare for trial the next day. And before they know it, they are going to see their children graduating from law school without ever having had an opportunity to appreciate their childhood.

Somehow or another we can be great lawyers. Somehow or another we can contribute to our community and our nation and our world. Somehow or another we can put our families first and still do that.

The last two verses from the Old Testament from the Book of Malachi say it best: "And behold, I shall send you the prophet Elijah before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord, and he shall return the heart of the father to the children and the children's hearts to their father, lest I come down and smite the earth with a curse."

