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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

ADDRESS TO DOJ EMPLOYEES

by

ATTORNEY GENERAL JANET RENO

Tuesday, April 6, 1993

11:58 a.m.

Courtyard
Department of Justice
Washington, D.C.

P R O C E E D I N G S

[Applause.]

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: As I have met and talked with so many of you, as I have seen the work that you've done, I am so very, very proud and this Department represents the American people in their quest for justice. You have a spirit and dedication that sets an example for everybody in public service. You care about the law, you care about doing it right.

It is a great honor for me to have the opportunity to work with each one of you: with the wonderful members of the support staff, who have made me feel so welcome throughout the Department, with the lawyers who I would match with the very best in this Nation, with law enforcement personnel that I think are an example for all in the criminal justice system throughout America.

All the divisions and the agencies of the Department have impressed me with their excellence, and their professionalism, and their commitment to what's right.

I'm the new kid on the block, and I thought I should let you know my hopes and dreams, and how I do things. While I'm the Attorney General, we will address each issue

with one question: What's the right thing to do?

[Applause.]

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: That can be a tough question, to decide what is right can often require debate and an open, reasoned and informed give and take between us all.

I am, and will be, accessible. If you have suggestions for improving the Department, or for better serving Americans throughout this Nation that you can't get implemented, I'm here and I want to meet with you, and I want to hear your suggestions.

If colleagues disagree on a course of action, I want to hear all the arguments. If you disagree with me about a position I have taken, or what I've done, tell me, argue with me, debate. Sometimes right and good are not that clear; at other times it is only deliberate and respectful debate that leads us to understand what road we should take.

Rather than disapproving, I will respect all the more the person who stands up to me in prepared and reasoned disagreement. I want this Department to be as open as possible, under the law.

We represent the American people, and we must be

accountable to the people. We must treat the people we deal with in every context of our service as if that is a member of our family, and we should ask ourselves, how would we want a member of our family to be treated if they were in the same situation?

We must explain our actions to the people when it will not compromise an investigation, prosecution or national security, not in obscure legalese but in the small old words we all understand. Too often lawyers have made the law a mystery; we must make it a lamp that shines the way.

We must reach out to become a department that reflects the diversity and excellence of America, and we must ensure equal opportunity for all Americans. I have been so impressed with the people with whom I have med in the Civil Rights Division, and with their deep and abiding concern for civil rights and its enforcement.

I look forward to continuing to work with them to make the goal of justice for all in America a reality.

[Applause.]

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Throughout the Department we must remember that people come first, and that we are here to serve all Americans.

We must remember the eleven-year-old middle-school student who asked me why his brother couldn't get treatment for his drug problem; the mentally-ill person who described to me numerous institutionalizations, suicide attempts and despair, and then to find her life was changes because somebody started treating her as a person and permitted her to participate; the president of the company who had economic hard times.

She was trying her best to comply with government regulations which were so confusing she had to hire a lawyer and spend the money on lawyers rather than putting it into the business to make it go.

We've got to remember the young, hard-working couple, many of them around America who have less real income than their parents did at the same age, and their hopes and dreams are cloudy; the elderly person in the nursing home who has no one to care; the angry young man who lashes out in violence because he never had a childhood.

Remember them all, for they are America, and they have powerful thoughts and deep feelings when asked the question, "What is the right thing to do?"

They are concerned about violence in our streets,

but we cannot respond with demagogic promises to build more jails and put all the criminals away.

[Applause.]

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: We must carefully use the limited resources at the Federal, State and local levels to put the real criminals away, while providing alternative sanctions for those people who are going to be coming to the community anyway in a fairly short time.

As we deal with the issues of violence and crime, we must never forget the awesome power of the Federal government, and we must harness that power to make sure that innocent people are not charged or even tainted by our actions, and that the guilty are convicted, according to principles of strict due process and fair play, and with adherence to our Constitution.

We must never forget the victims; they have rights too. In our plan, in our work with local law enforcement, we must do what we can to help victims overcome the impact of crime.

At the same time, we must work with other agencies in the Federal government to develop prevention and early intervention programs that can prevent the crime before it

occurs.

We must use our limited resources to build real partnerships with State and local governments, a partnership which is built on mutual regard and respect. I've been at the other end of the line, when somebody from the Department of Justice told me no, like they knew better.

[Laughter.]

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: They might have, but what I'd like to do is, by tone and manner, acknowledge them all as equals on this team, as we ask together, "What is the right thing to do?"

Many of us come from someplace else, and we remember our river, our hill behind the house, our desert at sunset, but I also remember the coral reefs I loved covered with silt, a bay that is dying, a river that is polluted.

I want to work with the Environment and Natural Resources Division and the EPA to protect this fragile continent, first by sending clear signals of what needs to be done, by showing America that it's the right thing to do, and by developing sensible procedures for easily understood compliance.

Those who fail to do what's right in protecting our

land, air and water should feel the pace of vigorous enforcement action.

But most of all, we must come back to the people, and remember them. The children of America, 20 percent of whom live in poverty, have no one to advocate for them; the increasing number of working poor and others who have no legal assistance; the woman who struggles to get off welfare only to find out that she was worse off than if she hadn't gone to work in the first place.

The law means little or nothing to these Americans, the Constitution is too often to them just a piece of paper. Our courts provide access to the rich, lawyers give legal advice to large corporations, too often more so than the average American.

But the courts and lawyers and the Department of Justice are too often not there for the average American, who does not know how to deal with the paperwork, the rules and regulations, the eligibility requirements, the licensing procedures, and the web of laws designed to make men free.

Working with other agencies, we have to make government user-friendly, so you don't need a lawyer to understand what you need to do to deal with your government.

Working with the best legal minds in America, we need to develop new and creative reforms that open our courts to all our people, and give every American the reason to believe that the Constitution is a living document that means something.

We've got to end the delay and the cost involved in using our courts. As Judge Learned Hand would say, "I must say that, as a litigant, I should dread a lawsuit beyond almost anything else, short of sickness and death."

We must never forget, however, that it is not government but the family that is the institution best designed to focus on a person and help them grow. I remember my afternoons after school and during the summertime. My mother worked in the home, my father worked downtown.

My mother taught us to play baseball, to bake a cake, to play fair -- she beat the living daylights out of us sometimes, and she loved us with all her heart; she taught us her favorite poets, and there is no child care in the world that will ever be a substitute for what that lady was in our life.

And now I look at the prosecutors in my office in Miami, struggling to get to work at 8:00 o'clock in the

morning, finishing trial at 6:30, home at 7:30, get dinner on the table, the children bathed, the homework done, and Saturday they run errands, and Sunday they go to church or sleep late, and Sunday night they start to prepare for trial again, and they don't have that precious, wonderful time to be with their children.

I want to do everything I can in this Department to put the family first, and to develop new attitudes and programs that will enable people to achieve their professional goals, of having the opportunity to spend quality time with their family.

[Applause.]

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: What is the right thing to do? Let us leave here today resolved to ask that of ourselves and others as we seek justice, remembering that sometimes doing the right thing is very politically unpopular. Sometimes it will be painful, or it will of necessity hurt someone.

But with strength and courage let us face that question unafraid, and together seek justice for all.

[Applause.]

Whereupon, at 12:08 p.m., the address was concluded.]