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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
OFFICE OF POLICY AND COMMUNICATION
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ADDRESS BY
THE ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES
THE HONORABLE JANET RENO

Sweetwater, Texas

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[THIS TRANSCRIPT WAS PREPARED FROM A TAPE RECORDING.]

P R O C E E D I N G S

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Thank you so much,
Congressman.

I'd like to tell you something. It's okay to walk back and forth to work two blocks, but to come home and represent your constituency and go back and deal with the great issues of this nation and have to run every two years, I think Congressmen and Congresswomen probably have the toughest job of anybody in America.

[Applause.]

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I'm proud to be here with him tonight, and I'm proud to be here with your Attorney General, who has already been to visit me and to represent the interests of the State of Texas with vigor and foresight and thoughtfulness, and it's a great honor. And it is a great honor to be here with so many people I've just met today.

And I'd like to tell you something. I woke up this morning, and it was raining. And I remembered the title of the chapter from a book my aunt wrote back in 1945, and it was "We Made It Rain in Texas".

[Laughter.]

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: And on the way over to the ceremony this morning, everybody said how wonderful it was that it was raining in Texas. And only the WASPs could make it rain in Texas and then make it sunshine for the ceremony.

[Laughter.]

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: And I think all the WASPs would like to join with me in reading to the people of Sweetwater in West Texas this description of what you all did following the Class of '37 and '43 [inaudible]'s graduation:

"The afternoon of the party, we all got attired in our best and went down to the City Hall to be made honorary citizens of Sweetwater. Each girl was given a certificate of citizenship. For six months, this Texas town had entertained us, worked with us, had done its best to make our life more pleasant. And now they gave us this final tribute. Little did they know.

"We sometimes wondered how Sweetwater stood all the WASPs [inaudible] in and out, just what they thought of this [inaudible], whatever they thought, they made us feel welcome, and no one [inaudible] by listening to the eulogies that were aired that day that we weren't the town's nearest and dearest."

And you've done it 50 years later.

[Applause.]

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: People asked me today out there [inaudible]: What do the WASPs mean to you? Let me tell you.

I was seven years old when the WASPs were disbanded, and my Aunt Winnie came home from the war. And shortly thereafter, some other WASPs came to Miami, and they became a part and parcel of our lives. We owned them. I owned Dot Swain. Bonnie owned Doris Gee. Margie and Megan had a fight between Lela Lauer and Carol Bailey, and I think Margie got Lela and Maggie got Carol.

But they were extraordinary. I can still see Aunt Winnie coming home in the blue uniform, and she was [inaudible]. And then Dot came down, and she was Miss Ophelia Jones in the air show. She put on a funny old hat and old lady's walking shoes, and she went out and flew this plane that she learned to fly [inaudible]. And Caddie Landry gave me the first plane ride I ever had. And Doris Gee and Lela Lauer told me about Texas, and I never understood what Texas was all about, and I still didn't understand after listening particularly to Doris Gee why Texas was so

important.

[Laughter.]

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: And Caddie bossed us around. Mildred Calew was wonderful to us. And they were extraordinary. Because what they did was -- I had the impression when I talked to one of them that I wasn't going to do anything bad, I wasn't going to do anything disrespectful, and it was not so much that I was going to get punished if I did, except maybe by Caddie Landry, and Doris Gee would tell me what she thought of me. But more important, I didn't want to be a disappointment.

And then I read the book, and then I heard the stories all over again. And I thought: I can do that. I can do anything I really want to, if it's the right thing to do and I put my mind to it, because those ladies went and flew planes. And for as long as I live --

[Applause.]

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Sometimes in these last few months, as I've dealt with some of the difficult issues, I think of what it was like flying over the Donner Pass, and you couldn't establish radio contact with Reno, and the left engine was beginning to sound rough, and somehow or another,

the story continues on: You can do anything you really want to, if it's the right thing to do and you put your mind to it.

But then I met other people along the way.

[Inaudible] came to town, and [inaudible] looked at me like: There's one of those young Renos, my goodness. But she, like the others, twinkled, and even though Caddie Landry said she didn't want anything to do with children, she didn't know why anybody had children, they all seemed to love us, [inaudible] included.

Then I met my own WASP, separate and independent from Aunt Winnie's WASPs, as I called them. I went to high school. One of my teachers in high school, Felicia West, was a WASP, and she taught me ever so much about how to play fair, how to be a good sport, how to lose, and how to pick yourself up and win again and do it the right way.

And then I came out to California and [inaudible] and Mary Nelson and Dot Swain and so many others made me feel welcome that summer. And I began to see what the WASPs were doing. They were going beyond the dedication [inaudible]. They were becoming great artists. They were doing things in their communities. They were becoming teachers. They were making a difference. They were raising families. I think

that's the first summer I thought: Gee, beginning to grow up instead of just a little baby.

Then I went to Cornell, and I met another WASP all on my own, only it was with the help of another aunt, and that's when I met Dawn Seymour and [inaudible] another heroine.

And to those of you who are between the ages of 25 and 30, let me tell you that a seven-year-old child about 48 years ago was touched again and again and again by women 25 to 30 who have made a profound, distinguished difference in my life.

But they keep coming back. They never leave. And you go out to see your Aunt Winnie and you see Doris Gee, and it's like Doris Gee never changed, and she sounds exactly the same. She's as bossy as ever. She's opinionated as ever. And she still loves Texas, even if she lives in California.

[Laughter.]

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: And Dot Swain doesn't look a day older, and she can still play the guitar and do as she did around the campfire 48 years ago. She can still sing "Those Brown Eyes".

These ladies have taught me ever so much. They

have given me strength and understanding. They have reached out and touched me as a child, as a teenager, as a college student, as a young woman, as somebody being mentioned for Attorney General, and in the darkest, loneliest days of these last few months. The WASPs have been there every step of the way. And what they have taught me --

[Applause.]

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Think of what these ladies have been through, us who are younger, who think we face so many challenges. These ladies grew up in a depression when you took a can of tuna fish and shared it between a family of five and made it go and then shared with some more people as you went along the way. And you don't feel sorry for yourself. You remember those times as extraordinary times when people shared.

And you went off to war to help defend a nation against one of the worst tyrants in the history of the world. And you remember it with pride and vigor, and you remember the fun stories along the way, and you remember those you lost with pride and honor.

The WASPs were not fancy people. You don't go into a WASP house -- I haven't been in a WASP house that was that

particularly fancy. They [inaudible] themselves. They're just real wonderful, great, honest, opinionated people.

[Laughter.]

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: And they went off to serve their country. Think about it. Look at our young people today. How many young people do you think would pay their own way to go to serve their country and fight for freedom? The WASPs did it. And they serve as an example for all of us. Let's go pay our way and fight for freedom.

They taught me, as I've said, that women can do anything they really want to, if it's the right thing to do. They taught me loyalty. Boy, these women can get in fights with each other, but they always make up. And they taught me about friendship and family. And they have interweaved through my family as if they had become a part of it.

But most of all, I think the WASPs had to fly airplanes. They had to get that plane back on the ground. And if they didn't get it back on the ground, the buck stops with them. They had to do the right thing in the air, and they've done the right thing on the ground every since, and they've been accountable for it, and they've had -- they're a remarkable inspiration for so many of us.

And now I'd like to challenge you all. The fight is not over. In these last few days and even before, you all have taught me that the next 30 years are going to be a wonderful time; 40 years is going to be a wonderful time. I'm going to grow old and have a thoroughly good time and fight and care and continue to care about America and never give up, because you all, if you can fly around this country and do everything that you're doing and being as wonderful and as graceful as you are, we've got a long time to do some more yet.

And I would like you to join me in a challenge. You helped weave the fabric of society around me, my brothers, my sister. You have been a part of our life and our family.

But there are an awful lot of children in America today who have no family and no structure around them. They're babies brought into a world of poverty, of a mother who's not there, of a father they've never seen.

They are the children with plenty of money in the world whose parents don't give a darn, because they're more interested in material things rather than what's right and what's wonderful in this world.

And somehow or another, all of America has to join

together to reweave the fabric of society around our children, who are the future.

All of us -- the WASPs, the Attorneys General, Congress, the State legislators, the citizens of Sweetwater, everybody that cares about the future of America -- have got to reach out and let children know that they are accountable, that if they do something wrong, there's going to be a WASP being disappointed. There's going to be a Doris Gee hollering at them. There's going to be a Caddie Landry speaking sharply to them. And most of all, there's going to be an Aunt Winnie looking at them very disapprovingly.

And if you've ever been looked at by an Aunt Winnie very disapprovingly, you know what that can mean. But if you've ever been looked at by an Aunt Winnie or a WASP with all the love and affection that I've been looked at this day and for the last 50 years, you will know what we have to give our children.

And let us join together to remember that the fighting is not over and to remember the last two verses from the book of [inaudible]: "And, behold, I shall send you the Prophet Elijah before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord, and ye shall return the hearts of the fathers

to the children and the children's hearts to their fathers,
lest I come down and smite the Earth with a curse."

God bless you all.

[Applause.]

[End of requested transcription.]