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NATIONAL COUNCIL OF LA RAZA

1993 SILVER ANNIVERSARY CONFERENCE AWARDS

BANQUET & DANCE

WEDNESDAY, JULY 21, 1993

RENAISSANCE CENTER, WESTIN HOTEL

GUEST SPEAKER

JANET RENO, ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES

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1 MS.. RENO: The man who paid the parking  
2 tickets out of his own pocket for people who  
3 could not afford them was an immigrant who came  
4 to this country when he was twelve years old  
5 speaking not one word of English. People laughed  
6 at him about his funny accent and his funny  
7 clothes, and he never forgot it, and he tried to  
8 be kind to everyone whom he came in contact  
9 with.

10 But America gave him opportunity. Four  
11 years later he was the editor of the high school  
12 newspaper, and for 43 years in Miami he wrote  
13 beautiful English for the Miami Herald as a  
14 newspaper reporter. He gave me the vision of  
15 what America should be.

16 I had the reverse experience. For 32  
17 years I lived in a community that did not reflect  
18 to great extent the diversity of the world, and  
19 now in these last 33 years it has become a  
20 wonderful, great -- wonderfully diverse city, an  
21 international city, a splendid city, made so by  
22 so many different people, so many different  
23 Latinos who have come from all parts of this  
24 hemisphere to contribute. And then I go to  
25 Washington to see Henry Cicteros and Frederico

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1 (inaudible) as my colleagues in the cabinet.

2 This nation is a nation of immigrants.  
3 It has a tradition of immigration that has made  
4 it splendid and strong and given it new visions.  
5 We must continue to maintain that tradition with  
6 all our heart and sole and every force that we  
7 can muster, but we must also understand the  
8 burdens that immigration in the eyes of some can  
9 place on so many of our public services, and  
10 rather than rale in rhetoric at the problem,  
11 we've got to approach the problem with thoughtful  
12 common sense and kindness, remembering that this  
13 is a nation of immigrants.

14 We have got to understand the problem  
15 is not immigration, it is illegal immigration,  
16 and we need to develop a system that is prompt,  
17 that is fair, that treats everyone involved with  
18 dignity; so for those who belong and have the  
19 right and have earned the right and are entitled  
20 to be here, we have got to assure that with due  
21 process and dignity.

22 For those not entitled to be here, we  
23 need to assure due process to them in a swift and  
24 understandable and dignified manner, with no  
25 abuse from any agency, but with fairness,

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1 objectivity, and they're doing it the right way.

2 Now, people say I've been a very  
3 popular Attorney General. I'm not going to even  
4 begin to believe that until I translate some of  
5 my words into actions, and I look forward to a  
6 dialogue with you and being accessible to you,  
7 but one of the ways I want to try to translate my  
8 hopes and dreams for immigration into action is  
9 to understand that I think this is going to be  
10 one of the most difficult issues I face in the  
11 time that I'm Attorney General.

12 I want to do everything I can to  
13 upgrade the management of the Immigration and  
14 Naturalization Service, make it an agency that we  
15 can all be proud of and make it customer  
16 friendly. There is no reason why people have to  
17 stand in line and not be able to get through on  
18 the telephone. Government is meant to serve the  
19 people.

20 One of the great occasions that I had  
21 as State Attorney in Dade County was to give a  
22 short talk upon occasion at Naturalization  
23 Services, and these were some -- I try not to  
24 cry, but I cry during those services; but I cried  
25 more when I would walk out and talk to people and

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1 find out how long it had taken them to get to  
2 that point. We can do it more effectively, more  
3 promptly, with greater dignity.

4 I remember my wonderful assistant in  
5 Miami, who had given so much of her family's life  
6 and liberty to fight against tyranny, who  
7 struggled and earned the right to be a citizen  
8 and who had to go poking around in office after  
9 office to find out why the delay. We shouldn't  
10 have to call United States senators to unlock the  
11 problem. Government should be immediately  
12 responsible to every single person seeking  
13 service from it in a dignified way.

14 I don't have all the answers, and I  
15 can't do it overnight, but I know working with  
16 you, talking out our problems, not with tension,  
17 but with thoughtful, problem-solving approaches,  
18 we can make a difference and build an Immigration  
19 and Naturalization Service that fairly manages  
20 this great balancing problem that we must face.

21 When I took office, I met with all the  
22 employees at the Department of Justice and told  
23 them that I wanted to approach everything we did  
24 at the Department with one overriding question:  
25 What is the right thing to do?

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1           Harry Truman once said that doing the  
2 right thing is easy, knowing what the right thing  
3 to do is, is very difficult. In a nation with so  
4 many diverse interests, with so many tensions,  
5 knowing what the right thing to do can be  
6 difficult. But again and again I am impressed  
7 when people sit down and talk out their problems  
8 and try to understand what's involved. We can  
9 make a difference.

10           I want to make one of the highest  
11 priorities of the Department of Justice the  
12 enforcement of our civil rights laws that prevent  
13 discrimination for all people. I want our laws  
14 to be understood and fairly explained. I don't  
15 want to talk in legalese. I want to talk in  
16 terms that America can understand.

17           I think one of the problems is that  
18 Washington speaks in alphabets and titles and  
19 Roman numerals and acts and things like that that  
20 so many citizens don't understand. I want to use  
21 small, old words that the citizens of this  
22 country can understand so they understand the  
23 duties placed on them to prevent discrimination,  
24 and then I want to work together with you to  
25 ensure that no one in this country is

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1 discriminated against based on who they are.

2 I want to work together to make the  
3 government of this country look like America and  
4 build diversity. We are looking forward to the  
5 confirmation of Gerald Toraz as Assistant  
6 Attorney General in charge of the Environment  
7 Division and Natural Resources Division, and  
8 Eduardo Gonzalez as United States Marshal, but  
9 we've got to go further, and I look forward to  
10 working with your leadership and doing everything  
11 I can to make America understand how incredibly  
12 wonderful and diverse it is and draw from that  
13 diversity and that difference the strength that  
14 makes us one great nation.

15 But no matter what we do in  
16 immigration, no matter what we do in civil rights  
17 enforcement, no matter what we do in terms of  
18 making our criminal laws and our law enforcement  
19 efforts in the United States fair and understood,  
20 firm when necessary, understanding when  
21 necessary, none of that is going to make any  
22 difference unless we are willing to make an  
23 investment in America's most precious possession,  
24 its children.

25 Its children have so much to offer.

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1 Last night and today I attended parts of a  
2 conference on youth violence. A young man by the  
3 name of Jose from Houston sat at the table with  
4 me at lunch, and he said: Could I ask you a  
5 question? A friend of mine was shot. The  
6 ambulance took him past three hospitals to a  
7 fourth hospital 30 miles away, why was that?

8 Children are so wise. They can ask  
9 such common sense questions. They are our  
10 future. For the businessman who says: I'm not  
11 interested in children, that's not my problem,  
12 unless we make an investment in all the children  
13 of America, not just some, we are not going to  
14 have a work force with the skills that can enable  
15 America to hire people, to maintain our work  
16 force, and to build a strong economy. Unless we  
17 invest in our children now, we will never have  
18 enough jails 18 years from now to house children  
19 who were neglected unless we invest in --

20 (applause) --

21 America has got to get over waiting for  
22 the crisis to occur and understand that smoke  
23 stacks are not nearly as valuable as people. How  
24 do we do it? Part of it depends on looking at  
25 children and families together.

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1           Latino families set an example for all  
2 Americans in terms of solidarity and closeness.  
3 I've already had three people come up and say:  
4 My sister said, my cousin said, my aunt so and so  
5 sends her best.

6           This is an incredible nation, but you  
7 and -- with your tradition and honor of family,  
8 can set an example of how important family is.  
9 We've got to invest in families. We've got to  
10 invest in making families strong and  
11 understanding that they are the best caregiver.

12           One of the problems in America is that  
13 for the last 30 years we've talked in symbols.  
14 We've taken the easy way out. We've often times  
15 thrown money at the problem. We've thrown money  
16 that we didn't have to throw at a problem, and  
17 done something that no businessman does, which is  
18 create an awful deficit; and if you let your  
19 Master Card run up, you know how much money you  
20 spend on interest that you could be spending on  
21 investing in your future rather than investing in  
22 the mistakes of the past.

23           The time has come, and we need to  
24 support the Administration's economic package to  
25 get that deficit reduced and to make an

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1 investment in real efforts that can make a  
2 difference, not -- (applause).

3 As I listen to these young people  
4 today, as I travel around America, crime is still  
5 a concern of so many Americans, and what we want  
6 to do is invest to get police on the streets, not  
7 police who are perceived as insensitive bullies,  
8 but police who are trained to be community police  
9 officers who understand everybody in the  
10 community and are on the cutting edge of  
11 prevention.

12 One of the most rewarding programs I've  
13 seen is of the community friendly, highly  
14 respected police officer who worked with gangs to  
15 pull the kids away from the gangs and diminish  
16 crime in the community without increasing the  
17 arrest rate that significantly. We can make a  
18 difference.

19 We can make a difference by providing  
20 drug treatment money as part of this investment  
21 package. Something is terribly wrong with a  
22 nation that tells a young man you can't have  
23 treatment because you don't have insurance and  
24 you don't have money, and that person is dying  
25 for treatment, begging for treatment, but he's on

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1 a waiting list some 60-long. We can't afford  
2 that. We've got to make that investment.

3 We've got to make an investment in Head  
4 Start, and we've got to make an investment in the  
5 president's Family Preservation Program. We can  
6 only do that if we approach the hard issues that  
7 face this nation and understand we're going to  
8 have to do more with less, that we are going to  
9 have to get that deficit down so we can start  
10 putting our dollars into things that count, into  
11 people and programs that help people become  
12 self-sufficient. We can do it if we work  
13 together and we need your support in these days  
14 that follow to get that reconciliation passed  
15 through Congress.

16 But if we do it, that's just the  
17 beginning. We have to look at a continuum, and  
18 we all tend to look in different places. I look  
19 forward to working with La Raza in making sure  
20 that we develop a national agenda for families  
21 and children that focuses on parents and makes  
22 sure that they're old enough, wise enough, and  
23 financially able enough to take care of their  
24 children.

25 The single hardest thing I know to do,

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1     except to be a child in this day and time, is to  
2     raise children. And it is the most rewarding  
3     experience that anybody can have. We've got to  
4     develop workplaces where parents can spend more  
5     time with their children, quality time, as my  
6     mother did as I was growing up when she worked in  
7     the home and took care of us and loved us with  
8     all her heart and spanked us too often I often  
9     thought.

10                 But there is no child care in the world  
11     that will ever be a substitute for what that lady  
12     was in our lives. We've got to invest in  
13     prenatal care and understand that for every  
14     dollar spent for prenatal care, you will save  
15     three dollars down the line.

16                 We have got to make sure that we  
17     understand in America what zero to three means.  
18     Teachers worry about Head Start through 12,  
19     doctors worry about problems, but when a family  
20     falls away from a child at zero to three, there's  
21     nobody to care; but 50 percent of all learned  
22     human response is learned in the first year of  
23     life. What good is an education going to do if  
24     you don't get the basics up front? Between zero  
25     and three the child learns the concept of reward

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1 and punishment and develops a conscience. What  
2 good is jail going to do 20 year from now if he  
3 is indifferent to punishment because he never  
4 learned what it meant?

5 We've got to make an investment through  
6 Educ-care and programs that care for our children  
7 and nurture them when you have a single parent  
8 who is struggling to work and be self-sufficient,  
9 or both parents struggling to work to give their  
10 children hopes for a future dream of a college  
11 education. We can do it if we make this  
12 investment up front.

13 We've got to free our teachers' time to  
14 teach, and we've got to again come back to that  
15 reconciliation package and make sure the monies  
16 are there for education. Think of what we have  
17 done in 30 years, the greatest burst of human  
18 knowledge in all of history, 100 years ago, July  
19 21st, 1893 to now: Flight, man to the moon,  
20 toxic energy, laser computer, sulphur,  
21 penicillin, modern operational techniques, the  
22 telephone, the car, the most incredible burst of  
23 human knowledge in all of history, and the  
24 schools can't begin to keep up with it because we  
25 place so many social burdens on them. Let us

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1 free the schools' time to teach, to make our  
2 children competitive with the rest of the world.

3 Let us understand that if we develop  
4 programs for our children after school and in the  
5 evening, those programs are going to be a lot  
6 less expensive than jails and foster care and  
7 other problems, and we can do so much more to  
8 develop these young people as constructive human  
9 beings; but most of all, let us talk to our  
10 youth. They have so much to tell us. They want  
11 so to be respected.

12 The young gang member, that I talked to  
13 at a facility recently, wanted to be somebody.  
14 He wanted to belong. He wanted a sense of  
15 purpose. He wanted an identity. He wanted to  
16 contribute. And the only way he could do that is  
17 through a gang. Surely we ought to be able to  
18 provide him an alternative through national  
19 service projects and community projects and a  
20 sense of belonging in a positive and constructive  
21 way. We can do it.

22 But we've got to learn how to talk to  
23 them. The police officers have got to learn how  
24 to understand body language, how to understand  
25 that accent, how to appreciate that joke. He's

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1 got to learn the cultural differences, and rather  
2 than disdain them, he's got to appreciate and  
3 understand them and support them.

4 We can train our police officers to be  
5 one of the greatest ambassadors for good in this  
6 land. We can train our teachers to do the same,  
7 but we have got to understand that our youth have  
8 so much to say, and we have got to listen.

9 We have got to listen to give them  
10 opportunities through job training and placement,  
11 to graduate from high school with a skill that  
12 can enable them to earn a living wage, that can  
13 contribute to our nation. We can never give up  
14 on any one of our children.

15 Jose, who gave me the -- expressed the  
16 concern about the ambulance that went for 30  
17 miles and turned around said: I want you to have  
18 this T-shirt; it's from the program that I was  
19 in, and this was the program that I was in and  
20 this is the program that saved me.

21 Juvenile justice programs can save our  
22 youth and we cannot give up on any one generation  
23 in America. It is all part and parcel of our  
24 fabric that makes us great, but the thing we've  
25 got to remember is it's not the programs, it's

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1 not the dollars, it's not the fancy ideas. It's  
2 the time, the love, the care and the supervision,  
3 and it's best said by the last two verses from  
4 the Old Testament, from the Book of Malachi:

5 "And behold, I shall send you the  
6 profit Elijah before the coming of the great and  
7 dreadful day of the Lord, and he shall return the  
8 heart of the children to the father, and the  
9 father's heart to the children, unless I come  
10 down and smite the earth with a curse."

11 God bless you all.

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