

COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS

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ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES**

**SCHOOL OF LAW
COMMENCEMENT**

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SANTA CLARA UNIVERSITY

**REPORTER: MARGARET DEVERS
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3 ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES

4 Thank you Father, thank you Dean Player and,
5 to the graduates, to the faculty, to the family and
6 friends who helped the graduates get here, thank you for
7 this high honor, for this degree from a great law school
8 and a great university.

9 From this law school, from this great land of
10 the west with its rich and wonderfully old heritage, but a
11 land that is also taking us into the twenty-first century,
12 from the family and friends that surround you today, you
13 will draw strength and courage and wisdom for the rest of
14 your life.

15 It has been a little over two years ago that
16 I came to Washington to face one of the greatest
17 challenges that any lawyer could undertake. I came along
18 but, in so many respects, I was not alone. Memories and
19 spirit and people came with me; their spirit was with me.
20 My law school name was with me, the man who admitted women
21 to Harvard Law School and encouraged us to continue our
22 efforts, a man who over these 30 years until he died last
23 year made it a point of seeking me out at bar meetings to
24 keep me encouraged and supported every step of the way.

25 It was my American history teacher in high

1 school who got me to thinking that I really could be a
2 lawyer; it was my college roommate who gave me coffee at
3 2:00 a.m. in the morning as I was trying to prepare for my
4 Constitutional Law course; it was the brother who teased
5 me unmercifully as I was growing up, and even to this day
6 calls me to tease me when he thinks I'm getting too big-
7 headed; there was my baby sitter who called from all the
8 way across the nation to tell me how proud he was of me.

9 All of these people, and so many more, have
10 been with me every step of the way. And the lessons that
11 I have learned along the way have been with me.

12 The Dean made reference to a house. When I
13 came to Washington, I suddenly found -- and I guess I knew
14 it but it hits you with a grim reality that you're
15 responsible for the FBI, the DEA, the Bureau of Prisons,
16 Immigration and Naturalization, and most of the
17 government's lawyers -- and you say, where do I begin?

18 I was reminded of the afternoon my mother
19 picked us up at school. We had lived in a small, little
20 wooden house that was too big for the children who were
21 growing fast. My father didn't have enough money to hire
22 a contractor to build the house and my mother announced
23 that she was going to build the house. And we said, "What
24 do you know about building a house?" She said, "I'm going
25 to learn."

1 And she went to the brick mason, to the
2 electrician, to the plumber and she talked to them about
3 how to build a house; and she built the house. She dug
4 the foundation with a pick and shovel, she laid the block,
5 she put in the wiring and the plumbing; and my father
6 would help her with the heavy beams when he came home from
7 work at night.

8 She and I lived in that house till just
9 before she died, before I came to Washington when she
10 died. And every time I came down the driveway and saw
11 that house standing there, as a prosecutor, as a lawyer
12 having a difficult problem to solve, that house was a
13 symbol to me that you can do anything you really want to
14 if it's the right thing to do and you put your mind to it.

15 But that house taught me a more important
16 lesson on August the 24th, 1992 when hurricane Andrew hit
17 the area and devastated it. About 3:00 o'clock in the
18 morning, the mother got up as the winds began to howl.
19 She was old and frail and dying, but she was totally
20 unafraid. She went over and sat down in her chair, folded
21 her hands and, as the winds crashed trees around the
22 house, she just sat there, for she knew how she had built
23 that house; she had not cut corners, she put in good
24 materials, she'd done it the right way.

25 When we came out in the early dawn, it looked

1 like a World War I battlefield, but the house had only
2 lost one shingle and some screens. That's the lesson that
3 I carried with me to Washington in trying to figure out
4 how to begin to administer the Department of Justice.

5 And so, draw strength and understanding and
6 wisdom from those who have touched your lives, from the
7 lessons that you've learned and will learn along the way,
8 and go forth to use the law, its principles and its
9 processes, to help others. Go forth and be yourself. Be
10 known for who you are, not for the law firm you're with,
11 not for the house that you live in, not for the money you
12 make, but be known for who you are, what you stand for,
13 and what you do for others.

14 The law has been a marvelous instrument for
15 me; I have loved it. I have loved what it can do for
16 people. And there are challenges that all of us, the new
17 graduates, the Attorney General, the seasoned
18 practitioner, all of us face. First, we have watched this
19 nation racked by a terrible violence in this past month
20 but we saw this nation come together in a remarkable way.
21 We saw the people of this nation speak out against the
22 hatred and the violence that had spawned that blast. We
23 saw the people of America reach out and hold the victims
24 and the survivors and help them begin to heal.

25 Yesterday, I was in Oklahoma City and talked

1 to survivors, talked to people who had been injured,
2 talked to people who had lost loved ones, and they said
3 the feeling that had come from across America is something
4 that kept them going.

5 I have watched America reach out and support
6 law enforcement in every step of the way in holding the
7 people accountable for this terrible evil, in cooperating
8 in every way possible. I have seen America speak out to
9 ensure that we protect the freedoms and the rights that we
10 hold so dear and that we honor the rule of law as we bring
11 these people to justice. I have seen America reach out
12 and defend this nation.

13 We criticize government, but there is no
14 other government in the history of the world that has ever
15 afforded its people such freedoms and such opportunities.
16 We must continue to speak out against the hatred and the
17 violence that would undermine it.

18 Lawyers sometimes tend to get stuck in their
19 little rut, they focus just on their case, their billable
20 hours, their clients, and they don't look beyond. And too
21 many professions are as focused. Look beyond and remember
22 what we stand for. We must, as a nation, continue to
23 speak out against violence, against hatred. And there's
24 nobody more persuasive than a good lawyer; let us put
25 those skills to work.

1 You can do it in simple and small ways. For
2 example, in Billings, Montana in November of 1993, bricks
3 were thrown into the homes of two Jewish families in the
4 community. The *Billings Gazette* responded immediately by
5 publishing a full-page menorah. The non-Jewish community
6 throughout Billings started putting the menorah up in
7 their windows; thousands of windows appeared with
8 menorahs. As the Jewish community worshipped at the
9 Hanukkah service, non-Jewish people stood outside to make
10 sure that nothing happened and those responsible faded
11 away.

12 We have seen another example this past week
13 of a profile of someone speaking out. We're not
14 Republicans and Democrats in this process, we're Americans
15 as we speak out. And I applaud George Bush for his
16 actions and for his eloquence when he resigned his
17 membership with the NRA. It is a true test of leadership
18 when you're able to tell your friends they're wrong.
19 Demonizing the men and women of law enforcement who put
20 their lives on the line each day in defense of our
21 freedoms is just plain wrong.

22 Everyone in public life, every lawyer, every
23 American, can learn from the powerful example of President
24 Bush that there are times when you have to tell your
25 friends they've done the wrong thing.

1 And we must think in other contexts. I will
2 always remember my father who came as a twelve-year-old to
3 Racine, Wisconsin. He spoke not a word of English. He
4 never forgot that people teased him about his funny
5 language and his funny clothes and he tried to be kind to
6 people for the rest of his life. Four years later, he was
7 the editor of a high school newspaper; and, for 43 years,
8 he wrote beautiful English for the *Miami Herald*.

9 We must remember where we came from and speak
10 out against bigotry, speak out against those who would be
11 intolerant.

12 Secondly, get involved, don't sit on the
13 sidelines; use the remarkable skills that you've developed
14 here either as a negotiator, litigator, or just a person
15 who thinks with the common sense and applies it to the
16 law.

17 Public service is a wonderful opportunity.
18 When I graduated from Harvard Law School in 1963 and
19 couldn't get the job that I wanted, I was envious of those
20 lawyers going on to Wall Street and to silk-stocking firms
21 across the country. Now, as I meet them, they are envious
22 of my opportunity and my career for public service.

23 You don't have to do just one or the other;
24 but public service along the way is an experience and an
25 opportunity that you will never forget.

1 Think broadly. I swore I would never be a
2 prosecutor; I thought prosecutors were more interested in
3 securing convictions than seeking justice. My predecessor
4 suggested that I might become the State Attorney and do
5 something about that concept. But, if you become a
6 prosecutor, think beyond. This is a great nation but it's
7 a nation that can be improved on; and let's work to do it.

8 The prosecutor who convicts that person and
9 sends him to jail and doesn't make sure that we have
10 enough jail cells, doesn't make sure we have good
11 treatment in the jails to solve the problem that caused
12 him to go there in the first place, is not the prosecutor
13 doing his or her job.

14 Public defenders are so important. It is
15 something I will never forget: about ten years ago, a
16 young man came up to me and said, "You defended me when I
17 was a juvenile. I was charged with a delinquent act. You
18 got me off on the right foot. And I'm married, I've got a
19 job; everything's been okay ever since."

20 But the prosecutor or the public defender who
21 ends the job in the court room isn't doing the job. That
22 public defender who watches somebody walk out the court
23 room free on a motion to dismiss, knowing they have a
24 crack addiction, who doesn't try to do something about it,
25 either in changing attitudes in the legislature, changing

1 attitudes in Congress or trying to find a treatment
2 program that will provide that help, isn't doing his or
3 her best to help the client.

4 But, if you don't want public service, just
5 think about what you can do as a lawyer participating in
6 the process. Too many lawyers get into it from a narrow
7 self-interest. Somebody is trying to rezone property next
8 to them, they get upset with city hall, they get into the
9 zoning battle, they learn about it, and some of them just
10 turn away after they've won their battle and go back to
11 what they were doing. But more and more and more, lawyers
12 are getting involved in the processes of government as lay
13 people working from the outside to improve government and
14 to make it more real for all people. Don't sit on the
15 sidelines.

16 I invite all of you to come to the Department
17 of Justice one day, to the Attorney General's conference
18 room, and look at the two great murals that were put on
19 those walls in 1937. One is a mural of justice granted, a
20 hopeful scene of people progressing with great industry,
21 with art and music, towards a better future; the other is
22 justice denied, a wasteland of brown-shirted thugs taking
23 people out in chains to prisons, of brown-shirted thugs
24 breaking violins and taking pens and paper. Those murals
25 were put on the wall of the Department of Justice in 1937,

1 four years before we went into World War II, four years
2 before we really spoke out against tyranny. We cannot sit
3 on the sidelines.

4 And, in one area, all of us must focus
5 attention; we have sat on the sidelines, been indifferent,
6 and ignored the future of America for too long. Our
7 children are our most precious possession; but our
8 children are being killed on the streets of America, our
9 children are not getting the education they need, our
10 children are not getting the development and the
11 opportunity and the positive structure they need to grow
12 to be strong, constructive human beings. And too many
13 lawyers along the way have focused on a personal injury
14 law suit or a large corporate transaction and forgotten
15 what our future is all about.

16 Unless we invest in our children today and
17 legal principles and process and structure that can give
18 them a strong and positive future, we are not going to
19 have a work force with the skills that can fill the jobs
20 that can maintain this nation as a first-rate nation.

21 I love lawyers because they can be so
22 creative, so innovative, so bold; let us take the
23 creativity, the energy, the intellect that abounds across
24 the campuses of the great universities of this nation here
25 today and put it to work as an investment in our future,

1 not in smokestacks, not in technology, but in what counts
2 most, our people. And to do that, we have to concentrate
3 on a third issue; we've got to make the law real for all
4 Americans.

5 The American Bar Association has done a study
6 in which they found that about half of those households of
7 3,000 low- and moderate-income households have at least
8 one legal need. The most prominent was for personal
9 finances, consumer issues, housing and real property,
10 personal and economic injury, wills and estates, and
11 family law. The sad conclusion of that survey is that 71
12 percent of low-income and 61 percent of moderate-income
13 legal needs are not being addressed by the civil justice
14 system in America today. What that means is that, for far
15 too many Americans, the law is worth little more than the
16 paper it's written on.

17 Too many Americans feel disenfranchised and
18 that they can't get their problems solved. Too many
19 Americans have confronted lawyers who get them a judgment
20 then don't follow through. Too many Americans have gotten
21 lawyers who don't listen to them and are more interested
22 in the processes of the court that don't go to solving the
23 person's problem.

24 On the east wall of the building of the
25 Department of Justice in Washington is a statement

1 chiseled into the stone. It says, "The common law is
2 derived from the will of mankind issuing from the people,
3 framed by mutual confidence, and sanctioned by the light
4 of reason." If people do not have access to the law, if
5 they do not feel part of the law, they become
6 disenfranchised and opposed. All of us, as lawyers, have
7 a special responsibility to make the law real for all
8 Americans.

9 We can begin to start speaking in small, old
10 words and get rid of, once and for all, the legalese that
11 has dominated this profession for too long. We can start
12 speaking in terms that people can understand rather than
13 Roman numerals and alphabets and titles that they don't
14 understand. We can go to legislatures, we can go to court
15 processes and rules and start framing issues in ways that
16 people can understand. The average person is real smart
17 until lawyers start confusing the issues sometimes.

18 But most of all, we have got to remember that
19 the law is people. It is not a motion to dismiss, it is
20 not a Federal Rule of Civil Procedure, it is not a
21 judgment that is the goal. What we are trying to do is
22 solve people's problems and protect their freedoms and
23 protect their interests. And, to solve people's problems,
24 we have to listen to them and look at them as if they are
25 the most important people around, not as if we're trying

1 to see our next appointment or are more interested in our
2 billable hours. We have got to figure out how to solve
3 people's problems.

4 Some are concerned about lawyer-bashing in
5 this country; I think the greatest single thing we can do
6 about that attitude is to solve people's problems, do it
7 in a cost-effective way, do it in a caring way, and make a
8 difference.

9 But the most important thing I urge you to
10 consider as you start this great adventure is remember the
11 most precious possession you have and will have, your
12 family and your friends.

13 I remember that lady who built the house.
14 She worked in the home when she wasn't building the house;
15 she taught us to play baseball, to bake sponge cakes, to
16 appreciate Beethoven's symphonies. She taught us her
17 favorite poets, she taught us to play fair, she loved us
18 with all her heart. And there is no childcare in the
19 world that will ever be a substitute for what that lady
20 was in our life.

21 I look at the young lawyers in America today
22 trying to raise families; getting breakfast on the table
23 and the children off to school; coming home after trial
24 after they've prepped their witnesses for the next day;
25 getting through the last vestiges of rush hour; putting

1 dinner on the table; getting the children bathed, their
2 homework done. Saturdays, they run errands; Sundays, they
3 start preparing for trial again. And suddenly, the six-
4 year-olds will be 16 and 26 before they know it.

5 Bringing up a child is the single most
6 difficult thing I have ever done in my life. A little
7 over ten years ago a friend died leaving me as the legal
8 guardian for her 15-year-old twins, a boy and a girl. The
9 girl was in love; and I've learned an awful lot about
10 raising children in the last ten years.

11 I've learned it takes intelligence, hard
12 work, luck, and an awful lot of love; but I have also
13 learned that it is one of the most rewarding experiences
14 that you can have, to send a young lady off to college and
15 then see her graduate cum laude in three years and, on
16 those occasions, have her throw her arms around my neck
17 and say, "Thank you, I couldn't have done it without you."

18 All I ask of you as you go out in this
19 wonderful new career is remember your family, remember the
20 children that you will have. If we can send a man to the
21 moon, surely, surely, surely we can all be lawyers; we can
22 achieve professional fulfillment while at the same time
23 putting our children and our family first.

24 When you go to that law firm, when you go to
25 that Department of Justice, the public defender's office,

1 the prosecutor's office, ask them about flex time and
2 telecommuting for both parents, not just for one.

3 And then, as you remember all the people that
4 have touched your life, as you remember this place, go
5 forth, build a strong family, develop a practice that
6 helps others truly, and go out and let us find peace in
7 this world.

8 God bless you all.

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CERTIFICATE

I hereby certify that this is the transcript
of the address at the School of Law Commencement made by

THE HONORABLE JANET RENO
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES

held on Saturday, May 20, 1995, at the Santa Clara
University, Santa Clara, California, and that this is a
full and correct transcription of the presentation.



MARGARET DEVERS

Official Reporter