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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE  
PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE

REMARKS BY  
ATTORNEY GENERAL JANET RENO

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8:55 p.m.

Department of State  
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Washington, D.C.

## P R O C E E D I N G S

MS. RENO: Thank you, Judge Webster, very much. What happened at the table this evening was that Judge Webster and I talked about the FBI and traditional things that one talks about with former colleagues of the Department of Justice. I saw Stuart Gersin and we talked about our transition, and thank you again for making it so easy and so helpful. But then I did what I do when I go to United States Attorneys' offices, when I go out to communities and I said to everybody at the table, these are opportunities that are important to me and I'd like to ask you one question and I would appreciate your candid answer. If you were the Attorney General of the United States, what would you do to improve the Department of Justice?

That's what precipitated the conversation that Judge Webster talked about and it was fascinating. There were words of trust. "I can't trust you. I would like to trust you." Don't trust me, just call me and let me follow-up and here is my telephone number. Now, I was the State

Attorney in Miami for 15 years and my home phone number was listed in the telephone book and I gave my telephone number, it was (305) 547-7103, and people called me and I responded to every telephone call. I can't do that anymore.

But I've invited the head table back to lunch in two or three weeks at the Department of Justice so that they can be a funnel or provide specifics to develop a trust. The trust is important because if you come in and mal mal me about my lawyers, I'm going to get real upset with you unless you've got specifics and I'm going to have my lawyers there and I'm going to be ready. But if you come in and talk about specifics and I will have my lawyers there and if you talk about something other than policy, if you talk about--I mean other than the specifics of the litigation, I want to work with you. I want to try to talk with you. I want to try to develop a trust that is so important amongst lawyers and I would like in that connection to talk with you tonight about three roles of lawyers.

I told you last year at this time that I loved lawyers and I love the law and frankly ladies and gentlemen, after this year I love lawyers more and I love the law more. I have seen great lawyers on both sides of the issues debate questions. I have seen lawyers use all their empathy, all their soul, all their spirit. I have seen lawyers talk about how to build business while at the same time meeting human needs. I love lawyers even more. But there are three roles that I think lawyers have tonight and in these days that are extraordinarily important. This may not be a report on the Department of Justice, but this is a sharing with you of what all of us as lawyers have to do to gain the public confidence and far more importantly, to move this nation forward in the right way.

In these past weeks we have seen a terrible violence rack this land, but we saw this nation respond. We saw it respond so valiantly and so magnificently. We saw people from all sides of the political spectrum speak out against hatred and violence. We saw people reach out to victims and

to their survivors and to help them and to hold them and to help them to begin to heal. We saw people from all across this nation respond to law enforcement, respond to the FBI and the DEA and the ATF. We saw people take steps to hold those accountable for this terrible tragedy. We saw people speak out and it is so important. We so people speak out for the rights and freedoms that we hold dear. As we talked about legislation we saw people talk about concerns for human liberties and we saw people come together, republicans and democrats from the Cabinet Room of the White House, talking about matters that we hold dear. How can we stop this while at the same time protecting the freedoms we hold dear? We saw people defend America. We cannot stop now.

I was in Oklahoma City this past Friday. The strength of that City is so remarkable. I met with victims and their survivors. It was extraordinary to watch people who had been touched and hurt and people who had lost those that they love reach out and stand up and say "We are going

to move ahead." From their example, lawyers across this nation have a special responsibility to speak out against the hatred and the violence that spawned that blast in Oklahoma City. To speak out against bigotry.

We all get too carried away in our little narrow role. Attorney General can be a narrow role, a corporate counsel. We lobby on the Hill for our specific pieces of legislation. We've got to lobby the people, Congress, legislators, city and county commissions across this land. We've got to stand up in our communities against bigotry, against hatred, against discrimination. How do you do it? First of all, you remember to speak out. Max Backus, the Senator from Montana I think said it best and I have some personal experience because I went to Billings, Montana and I saw what had happened. In November of 1993, rocks and bottles were thrown through the windows of two homes of Jewish families there in Billings. The community responded. The Billings Gazette responded with a full page minora advertised in its newspaper and

then suddenly the non-Jewish community responded with the minora in their windows. Then they responded by rallying around the temple where the Jewish people were celebrating their faith to make sure that nothing was going to happen and then the haters disappeared.

We lawyers, all of us, no matter who we are, republicans or democrats, private or public, have a responsibility to speak out. To speak out against hatred and violence. Haters are cowards. If they're confronted, they disappeared. If we are silent, they flourish. This past Summer I went to Denmark. My father was born in Denmark. He came to this country as a young man in the early 1900s. I went back to my relatives. I went back to people who spoke out against oppression. Each of us can speak out and we have seen it recently in a non-partisan thoughtful way by President Bush speaking out against those that would condemn law enforcement when they were trying to do their job.

You represent so many splendid interests in this country. You represent so many powerful

interests in this country, but each of you represents a landmark in your community and it is important that we speak out. But this evening, my friends spoke out about the government can do it better this way. "Why do you spend so much money going after me, when you don't even go after a simple perjury case?" "Why do you do this, if you do this?" These are the discussions we must have. These are the efforts that we must have to understand and to develop a dialogue of trust. They said they--now I don't quite trust you and I said don't trust me, just call me because I don't expect you to trust me until you develop the dialogue that knows that I've followed through and I tried to follow-up. This is one of the most difficult issues we face in the Department. If you call me about a pending matter and your lawyer is handling it with an Assistant United States Attorney and I get involved, politics, politics, politics. How do we set up a protocol so that we make sure there are no abuses in the system? We'd like to talk to you about it. We'd like to make



sure that you don't use the power of your position to seek redress in my office when this is a matter that should be litigated in the courts. But at the same time, if there is an abuse in the court, we want to make sure that we have the power of the process.

To give you an example, when I came into office, I discovered that if there was a complaint or if a Federal District Judge found that there was misconduct on the part of the Assistant U.S. Attorney, we wouldn't do anything until after the appeal was taken. I said that doesn't make any sense. If something was wrong, it was wrong then, it's not wrong after the appeal was taken. Let's look at it now. And so we've tried to make the process current. We have tried to respond and we have tried to follow-up and make public our processes so that people understand.

Now I've invited this table back for lunch in three weeks. Make sure that it's a representative table. I assume that by your putting them around me that they are

representative. Make sure that we feed this in and that we not only continue the dialogue after these three weeks, but on into the future. But it goes to my second point. This is an extraordinary nation. I've done an awful lot of reading. Somebody asked me what I did when I got home at night? How I distinguished the night versus the day. When I close my apartment door, I sit down and I start reading poetry or I start reading about Abraham Lincoln or I start reading about the Greeks and you find a tremendous range of human history. But I can't find a government in all of history that has ever given its citizens so much opportunity and so much freedom. I came to this government suspicious of the Feds. I, like you, had had the Feds come to town and say we would do this, but not this and my role is to try to make the Federal Government in the form of the Department of Justice as responsive as possible to the people, all of the people. That young woman who stood up at UCLA Law School this past Sunday and talked about how she had been an undocumented

alien coming into this country illegally. How her sixth grade teacher had told her that she didn't care what her status was, she was going to be a leader of this country for the future. About how her high school teacher had told her that she could make a difference and go to law school. I don't care who you are, I want to try to be as accessible as possible to make this government as responsive as possible. You and I are going to disagree. The man from Dupont and I are going to get into a fussing match, I am sure, but he's going to trust me by the end of this because we are going to have discussed it and understand that there are policy issues and not trust issues that are at odds.

What I ask of you is don't be single issue. Take the same concern you have for what's happening in your litigation and go to your communities. Go to your state legislators. I've lobbied in the Florida Legislature for money for criminal justice for a long time. I lobbied for money for juvenile justice. There were very very few lawyers lobbying with me. Most of them said

that those that were lobbying were liberal, soft hearted, day care workers. All America has got to lobby for a whole government at the state, local and federal levels that make a difference. You can participate. I watched Alva Chapman bring lawyers in from all of the community in Miami to make the Miami Coalition, a drug coalition formed to do something about drugs in our community and make a difference. I just hope that lawyers understand how effective you can be. Take the energy that you have to lobby Congress and go after your community. Stuart Girksen, what are you doing in Washington these days?

MR. GIRKSEN: I practice law for a living.

MS. RENO: What are you doing about your City? You live in Chevy Chase, remember your city. These are the things, remember where you live. Remember the state that you live in. Remember that this government is great, but it's not perfect. Instead of slamming it, let's work together and I pledge to you to work together to make it a better government. But most importantly, all of us,

whether we're republicans, democrats, business sector, Justice Department, whoever we are, have a crisis on our hands and I addressed that the last time I was here. I talked to you about a government and a system of laws where too many people in America feel the law is not worth the paper that it's written on, because too many people in America do not have access to legal services, and to the judicial system. The latest studies of the American Bar Association confirmed that.

Now you can say that's their problem, but I don't think you are because unless we say it's all our problem, we are going to have a system of people so disenfranchised, so suspicious of power that we are going to have a lot more problems than we see now. There are so many people that just feel alienated from government because they can't get the landlord to fix the plumbing that's falling in from the ceiling upstairs into their kitchen below. So many people that do not have an understanding of how they can get off welfare because the welfare system just keeps stomping them

down as they try to get a job and make ends meet.

All the lawyers that I've seen most recently, except for some very very public spirited people, are single issue. They're looking at it from a defense lawyer's perspective. They're looking at it from a plaintiff's lawyer perspective. They're looking at it from an anti-trust lawyer's perspective whether they like Ann Bingham or they love Ann Bingham. Everybody has their perspective. Let us take the energy of this land and come together and address the issue of who we make the law real for all American people. There are many law firms in this room that have signed up for the American Bar Associations challenge for pro bono efforts and I just commend you again and again and again. Who's here from Steptoe and Johnson?

You don't know what it's like to walk in to an elementary school in Washington, D.C. on a Saturday afternoon, not a Saturday morning, but a Saturday afternoon at 2:00 o'clock in the afternoon with my paint clothes on and find partners,

relatively senior partners, and forgive me if they were really senior partners, from Steptoe and Johnson on ladders painting, cleaning bathrooms, secretaries, lawyers together making a difference in an elementary school in Washington. That is something that I will not forget. To hear of a senior senior lawyer in this city going to an Anacostia church regularly on a Saturday morning making a difference.

Now these were not necessarily legal efforts, but some how or another, we can make the law real for all people. I would challenge you, I'm going to have lunch with you all in three weeks, let's come back together and not only discuss how we can build the bridge of trust with the Department of Justice, but how we can build a bridge of trust with all Americans for their lawyers and what we in the Department of Justice can do along with you and with your companies and with the clients that you represent to make the law real for all Americans again. Thank you.

[Whereupon, the Proceedings were concluded.]