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DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA STATE CONVOCATION

WORKING TOGETHER TO BUILD OUR CAPITAL

Tuesday, September 7, 1993

Washington Convention Center

New York, 9th and H Streets

Washington, D.C.

9:50 a.m.

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1 STATEMENT OF R. DAVID HALL, PRESIDENT, BOARD OF EDUCATION
2 OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

3 Mr. Hall: We are very pleased this morning that with
4 us, bringing our keynote message for this convocation, is
5 a person who was born and developed in her early years in
6 Dade County, Florida, and attended public schools there.

7 She graduated and attended Cornell University, from
8 which she graduated in 1960, majoring in chemistry, and
9 then attended Harvard School of Law, graduating in 1963.

10 She became a partner in the Miami-based law firm of
11 Steel, Hector and Davis and served as an Assistant State
12 Attorney and as staff director for the Florida House of
13 Representatives' Judiciary Committee.

14 She also was appointed by the Governor of Florida to
15 the position of State Attorney in Miami. And then she was
16 elected to that position five times subsequently.

17 On March 12 of 1993, President Clinton appointed her
18 to become Attorney General of the United States America.

19 And although we understand that she has to be at the
20 White House at 10:00 o'clock, today I want you to please
21 warmly receive the highest ranking law enforcement
22 official in the United States of America, Ms. Janet Reno.

23 [Applause.]

24 Attorney General Reno: It was 49 years ago,
25 probably, this week, that I went off to the first grade.

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1 I did not want to go to school. I wanted to stay home and
2 explore the world around me.

3 I ran behind the house and cried the first week, but
4 then I began a great adventure. And in these last six
5 months, as all my life has passed before me, I have
6 recalled the adventure again and again.

7 I have heard from elementary school teachers who
8 taught me; from my seventh grade science teacher who
9 taught me about dinosaurs; from my American history
10 teacher who taught me about government and the wonder of
11 public service; from my phys ed teachers who taught me how
12 to do that hook shot; from my music teachers who gave up,
13 because I cannot carry a tune --

14 [Laughter.]

15 Attorney General Reno: -- but never gave up
16 instilling in me an appreciation for music.

17 I have a Mary Poppins book that my second grade
18 teacher gave to me. And I feel their touch, their voice,
19 their support, their gentle criticism even onto this day.
20 They and you have created a magic, a magic of words, of
21 music, of ideas, of action.

22 And we all go back to our schooling. Those were a
23 time of challenge, those years. It looked like we were
24 going to win the war, but we were in the middle of one of
25 the great wars of our history.

1 And we thought those times were extraordinary, but I
2 suggest to you, in these 49 years hence, we have been in
3 as difficult a time. And you, as the teachers of America,
4 have been there on the cutting edge of the challenge.

5 You, as the teachers of America, have been the people
6 most responsible for ending 200 years of slavery in
7 America and of making people respect our differences,
8 while bringing us together. The public schools bore that
9 burden.

10 You have been the institution most responsible for
11 stepping in to mend the broken hearts and to wipe away the
12 tears of children who have watched families disintegrate
13 around them.

14 You have not given up, despite the fact that too many
15 Americans, in these last 49 years, have forgotten and
16 neglected our children. And, yet, look at the
17 circumstance in which you have done that.

18 Facing all of these problems, you have faced the
19 greatest burst of knowledge of all of human history -- man
20 to the moon, flight, atomic energy, sulphur, penicillin,
21 television, telephones.

22 In these last 100 years, we have had an incredible
23 burst of human knowledge. And you, on the front lines,
24 have had to be the people responsible for translating what
25 the scientists and the physicians have learned to our

1 students and to the children who are our future.

2 You have been the heroes and the heroines. And I
3 know a little bit of what I speak, in terms of the
4 District, because I have been to some of your schools.

5 In time of fear, I have seen you give courage to your
6 students. In time of despair, I have seen you give hope.
7 In times where they are curious, I have seen you give
8 knowledge. In times when they question themselves, I have
9 seen you give them confidence. You are responsible for
10 our future.

11 But all of us are here in America together at a very
12 special moment; a moment when it requires that all of us,
13 no matter what we do, make sure that we put children first
14 in America.

15 [Applause.]

16 Attorney General Reno: Congresswoman Norton, day in
17 and day out, tries to put children first in Congress. But
18 throughout America, we are going to have to let everyone
19 know that in Congress, in our work place, on our streets,
20 in our athletic fields, that children come first.

21 [Applause.]

22 Attorney General Reno: To do that will require that
23 we reach beyond our professions and our narrow interests
24 -- whether we be Attorney General, teacher, plumber -- and
25 understand that we have to look beyond, to children, as

1 they grow up.

2 You see what happens when other institutions,
3 including the family, fail to nurture and to create a
4 bonding situation with children zero to three.

5 You, better than anybody, except the experts in child
6 development, understand that 50 percent of all learned
7 human responses are learned in the first year of life;
8 that the child develops the concept of reward and
9 punishment, and develops a conscience in zero to three,
10 for you have received too many children from other
11 institutions whose world has fallen away from them and who
12 come to you without the fabric of society woven around
13 them. And it is your duty, day in and day out, to try to
14 reweave that fabric.

15 Rather than just reweaving the fabric, let us all
16 join together in making sure that at every level of
17 government, in the private sector, everywhere in America,
18 we start focusing on children zero to three, and give them
19 the care, the structure, the medical care and all that is
20 necessary to grow as strong, constructive human beings.

21 Let us learn how to talk to children. You know it
22 better than anybody else. You know what it is like when
23 you see that sullen young man look at you skeptically,
24 questioning, angry.

25 With a tone of voice, with a manner, with body

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1 language, you can suddenly bring that smile. With a
2 little bit more motivation, a little bit more
3 encouragement, a little bit more compassion and a little
4 bit more teaching, you suddenly begin to make him think
5 that he can become a marine biologist, that he has a
6 future.

7 But it takes such patience. And it takes an
8 understanding of how remarkably wonderful our young people
9 are. They are so tough. They are so bright. They have
10 such good instincts. They have such good understanding.

11 We have got to be the key. Through our tone of
12 voice, our manner, our way in which we respect them, we
13 have got to give them the key to their future.

14 We have got to look at that parent who comes to
15 school in the same way -- angry, questioning. And instead
16 of being angry back, we have got to bring that parent back
17 into the fold.

18 We have got to make that parent think he or she is
19 somebody, that they can make a difference in their child's
20 life and their neighborhood's life and their school life,
21 that they can participate in the school system.

22 [Applause.]

23 Attorney General Reno: You say, "But they do not
24 care."

25 Every time I have knocked on a door, every time I

1 have tried to sit and talk, I find that behind the door,
2 behind the anger, behind the indifference, behind that
3 glazed look, is a person who cares, if we take the time to
4 reach out, to be a little bit patient and to understand.

5 [Applause.]

6 Attorney General Reno: We must not be afraid to be
7 creative and to be innovative and to understand that
8 education, as I knew it in the first grade 49 years ago,
9 might not be the same today or the same in ten years, and
10 that we have got to learn to grow as society grows.

11 We have got to make America understand how wonderful
12 its differences are, how incredible the diversity of
13 America is, what strength it gives us, what understanding
14 it gives us.

15 And we have got to let America understand how
16 important it is to value our diversity and to build on it
17 as one strong nation together, but different, and
18 appreciating the differences.

19 We have got to address -- as the schools have done so
20 well in terms of educating and preventing drug abuse, we
21 have got to address the issue of violence.

22 We have watched vast monies poured into prisons, into
23 interdiction efforts aimed at drug usage in America. And
24 many of the experts will tell us that it was education and
25 prevention that was as important or more important. We

1 can do the same with violence.

2 Instead of saying, "That is not my problem," we can
3 start in those years teaching conflict resolution through
4 peaceful means.

5 If we can teach people not to use drugs, we can teach
6 people that we can resolve our conflicts and live together
7 peacefully without violence. You see the results --

8 [Applause.]

9 Attorney General Reno: You see the results in your
10 classrooms, day in and day out, of what happens after
11 school and in the evening on that other marvelous educator
12 that has been so abused and misused throughout America.

13 And you have got to join the voices crying out to
14 advertisers that we have a wonderful opportunity to help
15 our teachers throughout America in the afternoons and in
16 the evenings by programming strong, constructive, positive
17 programs for all American children and all American
18 families.

19 [Applause.]

20 Attorney General Reno: You have got to persuade all
21 Americans to come to your schools. Some will be stronger
22 than others at volunteering in the schools, but we all
23 have got to reach out.

24 This June, a young lady graduated from high school in
25 Miami. I had been her mentor for four years. She has now

1 come to Washington to continue her education.

2 And I am now looking to Washington to find me another
3 student that I can mentor and another elementary school
4 that I can work with. And I think I have found one. And
5 I look forward to going back to Raymond Elementary, which
6 greeted me in a time of crisis.

7 [Applause.]

8 Attorney General Reno: That school, during those
9 terribly bleak, tragic periods, showed what children and
10 teachers can do alike, in standing up to adversity and
11 showing that we will prevail.

12 But what we have got to do is put children first in
13 America; lawyers volunteering to help children, doctors
14 going that extra effort, teachers spending that extra
15 effort. Attorneys General -- whoever we are, we have got
16 to put children first, both in our homes and in our
17 schools.

18 And I will close, as my mother closed a speech to the
19 PTA at Sunset Elementary in South Miami a long time ago.
20 Two teachers have written to me in these past months,
21 reminding me of that speech, but I will never forget her
22 practicing it.

23 She told them all what she hoped for her children,
24 but then she turned to all of the teachers assembled in
25 that PTA that night and said, "I do not care whether you

1 send them home with A's and B's, but I thank you for
2 sending them home with stars in their eyes."

3 And for all of us, I thank you for sending them home
4 with stars in their eyes.

5 [Applause.]

6 Dr. Smith: Let us give her another big round of
7 applause.

8 [Applause.]

9 Dr. Smith: Is it not great to have someone as your
10 Attorney General who truly understands the need to put
11 children first? And I think she emphasized that
12 throughout the summary.

13 [Applause.]

14 Dr. Smith: We do thank her for joining us. And we
15 realize her very busy schedule, but I was with Attorney
16 General Reno this summer at a couple of meetings. And
17 believe me, what she says is what she will follow through
18 with.

19 From her office, children will be placed first. And
20 we know where Raymond Elementary School is located. And I
21 am sure that she will follow through on that promise.

22 Thank you, Attorney General Reno.

23 Give her another round. That is fine.

24 [Applause.]

25 Dr. Smith: As you notice, we have been joined by

1 council member, Hilda Mason. She has just indicated to me
2 that she cannot stay, because she has to leave to take Mr.
3 Mason to the doctor, I believe it is, but we do want to
4 recognize her.

5 If you would, stand, Ms. Mason, and be recognized.

6 [Applause.]

7 Dr. Smith: At this time, we are going to be provided
8 with another solo, a musical selection by Ms. Jewel
9 Colbert-Jenkins. And she will be accompanied by Mr. James
10 Curtis from Brown and H.D. Woodson Senior High Schools,
11 respectively.

12 MUSICAL SELECTION BY MS. JEWEL COLBERT-JENKINS

13 Dr. Smith: Thank you, Ms. Jenkins.

14 I want to just take a very few minutes to somewhat
15 make some closing remarks and to thank some people who
16 have been very much involved in putting this activity
17 together.

18 I think our Attorney General said it all when she
19 said putting children first. As you know, we talk,
20 consistently, about becoming a student-centered
21 environment, moving more resources to the schools.

22 And I think that is what we have been about this
23 summer -- at least, attempting to do just that. It is not
24 complete yet. I think all of you recognize that, but
25 obviously we are going to do more with putting the

1 services where the students actually are.

2 I would hope that this would be the year that we
3 truly begin to focus on student success, student
4 achievement, students directly.

5 As you know, in the past, we have dealt with many
6 other areas, not to say that we did not focus on
7 curriculum development, staff development, because I think
8 all of those are key factors, if we are going to move
9 forward.

10 But it is truly our intent, as we become a
11 decentralized school system, to truly recognize the
12 talents and the skills that are in each of the respective
13 employee groups.

14 You know best how to do your respective jobs. And
15 what we intend to do is to involve you more in the process
16 of making decisions as to how we go about accomplishing
17 the District's goals, working in the focus areas that we
18 have identified.

19 I would hope that each of you that is present here
20 today would be able to find your niche, in terms of how
21 you can contribute to helping us to achieve those goals
22 and have success in those focus areas.

23 You probably noticed, in your program, there are any
24 number of workshops scheduled for us for the remainder of
25 the day. I would hope that all of you would take

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1 advantage of that.

2 If I am not mistaken, I think we have sent to each
3 school and each office a certain number of positions that
4 you would have in these sessions, but I would be the first
5 to say, if you get to a session and find that it is
6 crowded, please, just move on to the next session. And I
7 am sure that will be just as interesting and as motivating
8 for you.

9 We want this to be a day, truly, where you can find
10 out what the new trends are going to be in education, what
11 DCPS is all about.

12 Quite often, many of you tell me that we only work
13 with one segment of our employees and the others are left
14 out. This is a day, if you looked in your book, with all
15 of the workshops that are scheduled, you can see that we
16 have a variety of them that are designed to educate and
17 inform all of you as to where we are.

18 The second thing that I would hope you would take
19 advantage of would be the exhibit hall. Let me assure you
20 that there are exhibits that will certainly help you and
21 enhance you in the professional area.

22 But I think you will find exhibitors that would be of
23 tremendous assistance to you from a personal standpoint,
24 as well. If you have not toured the exhibit hall, there
25 are over 80 exhibitors that are located there.

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1 And we hope that you will take advantage of seeing
2 what they have to offer. There is a lot of material that
3 they will hand out to you.

4 And, of course, the expectation with many of them is
5 that we would also be able to purchase -- if not now, make
6 some commitments for the future, to purchase various items
7 from them.

8 I also want to, before closing, really give some
9 special recognition to the individuals who have helped put
10 this entire convocation together.

11 As you know, you look at all of the signs. You look
12 at the easiness in which we registered this morning; the
13 directions in which the traffic was able to flow into this
14 particular hall and Hall C, as well. We do have people
15 that are in Hall C at this particular time.

16 There are individuals who have been working on this
17 committee for some three or four months, I would imagine.
18 And that committee has been led by, headed by our own Dr.
19 M. T. Brown, who is on the stage. I hope you will give
20 her a round of applause, before we move on to the others.

21 [Applause.]

22 Dr. Smith: In addition to that, she has headed a
23 host of individuals. And they are all listed in your
24 program, and some who have worked that are not in your
25 program.

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1 I was down here yesterday -- a holiday. And I bet
2 you there were 300 or 400 people down here helping to put
3 this together, so that when you walked in today,
4 everything would be in place.

5 Would all of the committee members stand, wherever
6 you are, if you worked in any way, contributed in any way
7 to helping to put this conference together, so that we
8 might recognize you?

9 [Applause.]

10 Dr. Smith: Dr. Handy and some of the -- all of you.
11 Do not be shy. Just stand. We want to recognize all of
12 you.

13 But we do thank all of you who worked, whether you
14 are standing to be recognized or not, because we know that
15 there were any number of you that participated in this
16 event.

17 I hope that you have been given the necessary
18 ingredients that would whet your appetite, to really make
19 you go to the sessions that are scheduled for you, and
20 take the information that you will be able to use in your
21 respective jobs throughout this 1993/1994.

22 I have a feeling -- and I hope that you could join me
23 -- that this truly is going to be a year in which all of
24 us would want to remember, because of the many successful
25 things that we will be able to accomplish, working in the

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1 best interests of all of our students.

2 You know my favorite saying, "Determined people
3 working together can accomplish anything."

4 And I do pledge and rededicate myself to work with
5 you. And I solicit your support, your cooperation in
6 working with us to make it a success.

7 We have a few minutes left before we are scheduled to
8 go to the next session, which is great. It will give you
9 an opportunity to tour the exhibit hall and to take care
10 of some other needs that you might have, but I do hope
11 that at 10:45 that you will be in the sessions.

12 I want to thank all of my platform guests, our board
13 members and council members for being present. And we do
14 wish for you a most successful year.

15 Thank you very much.

16 [Whereupon, at 10:20 a.m., the presentation ended.]

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