

1 REMARKS BY

2 U. S. ATTORNEY GENERAL JANET RENO

3 BEFORE THE

4 ROCKY MOUNTAIN COLLEGE COMMENCEMENT EXERCISES

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13 Saturday, May 7, 1994

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18 Fortin Hall
19 Rocky Mountain College
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P R O C E E D I N G S

(11:03 a.m.)

PRESIDENT DeROSIER: Later in this program, our distinguished commencement speaker will be awarded the College's highest honor, a Doctorate Degree, thereby linking her name and ours forever more. At that time a citation will be read off offering highlights of her distinguished career, spanning the twenty-one years since receiving her LLB degree from the Harvard Law School.

Therefore, it would be repetitious to state in this introduction what you will hear a half-hour hence. I would rather set those facts and figures aside and introduce our speaker another way.

When the Republic began in 1789, President Washington and the Congress with which he worked, created four executive positions; the Secretaries of State, Treasury, and War, and the Attorney General, not yet a cabinet position, but an attorney to advise the president on what soon would be a flood of laws and one to stand above other attorneys, hence the word "General". That difficult post has been central to the operation of our nation ever since, and it has never been in better or more capable hands than it is right now. A historian friend of mine claims that of all cabinet positions, Americans tend to forget the names and contributions of Attorney General's

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1 before others. Despite the fact that the contention made
2 be as untrue as it is debatable, I can assure you that this
3 Attorney General is one who will not be forgotten so long
4 as dedicated service and solid accomplishment holds center
5 stage in the minds of most people.

6 When President Clinton appointed Janet Reno as
7 Attorney General of the United States on March 12, 1993, he
8 knew he was getting a star, one whose career as State
9 Attorney in Miami, Florida, had earned her reelection after
10 reelection, a Medal of Honor award from the Florida Bar
11 Association, and national attention and applause,
12 particularly for her constant advocacy of early intervention
13 and preventative programs.

14 It was my honor to have served at one time on the
15 Idaho Pardons and Parole Board, and I can tell you from
16 personal experience that prevention is the brass ring we
17 seek. Imprisonment is the result of failure and does not
18 stem the flood of crime that plagues our nation today.
19 Crime must be combated and the guilty punished, but how much
20 better it would be to have in place programs that blunted
21 or prevented crime before it starts.

22 One of the strengths of our nation is its ability
23 to attract to public service many of our finest and most
24 dedicated citizens. They come from throughout the republic
25 and they serve in many different capacities. Some, of

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1 course, stand above others for myriad reasons: They care
2 more; or circumstances call for courage, fairness and
3 decisiveness; or their vision carries them beyond today to
4 a better day if the right decisions are crafted now.

5 You can name leaders who fit those three
6 categories, and you can come up with more and different
7 categories. Yet today, Rocky Mountain College has on its
8 campus a national leader and role model whose intelligence,
9 humility, and honesty, mark her for greatness, and whose
10 presence here honors our state, our college community, and
11 especially the graduating class of 1994.

12 College and friends, please join me in welcoming
13 to Montana the Attorney General of the United States, Janet
14 Reno.

15 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Graduates and new friends,
16 I am so honored to be with you as you embark on the great
17 adventures before you. This is a magnificent land of the
18 Big Sky. One feels at one with the earth and the sky and
19 the water here, as I have felt just in the limited hours I
20 have been here. It makes me forget the dull days and the
21 crush of cities, and they seem far removed from what life
22 is all about. From this land where you come from, or where
23 you came to learn, you will draw strength and courage as you
24 leave, and that strength and courage will be with you for
25 the rest of your life.

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1 A little over a year ago I came to Washington very
2 suddenly and very unexpectedly to embark upon one of the
3 greatest adventures that any lawyer could undertake. I came
4 alone to face a new and incredible challenge. But I was not
5 alone, my past came with me: An American history teacher I
6 had in high school; a college professor; my college
7 roommate; people I had known all my life; my baby-sitter,
8 it was amazing. You are the people who have touched your
9 life and you become part and parcel of their lives for the
10 rest of time. And you will remember the stories that you
11 have drawn strength from over your life and what has
12 propelled you through these months and this year.

13 And where I came from and who I was and where I
14 went to school and what I learned, one of the first and most
15 important lessons that I learned was from my mother. We
16 were four children a year apart, in a small house. My
17 father didn't have enough money to hire a contractor and we
18 were quickly outgrowing the house. One afternoon my mother
19 picked us up at school and she announced that she was going
20 to build a house, and we said, What do you know about
21 building a house? And she said, I'm going to learn.

22 And she talked to the brick mason, the plumber,
23 the electrician, and she learned how to build a house. She
24 dug the foundation with her own hands with a pick and
25 shovel; she laid the blocks, she put in the electricity and

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1 the plumbing, and my father helped her with the heavy beams
2 at night. She and I lived in that house until she died just
3 before I came to Washington.

4 And as I would come down the driveway through the
5 woods to see that house standing there, and I would have
6 difficult problems as a prosecutor figuring out how to
7 handle things, or if I faced another conflict in my life,
8 that house was a symbol to me that you can do anything you
9 really want to if it's the right thing to do and you put
10 your mind to it.

11 And that house taught me a more important lesson
12 in August of 1992, when Hurricane Andrew hit the area and
13 devastated our particular area. About 3:00 in the morning
14 the winds began to howl, and my mother, who was old and
15 frail and dying, got up. She sat in the chair and folded
16 her hands. And as trees crashed with terrible noises around
17 the house, she was totally unafraid, for she knew how she
18 had built that house. She did not cut corners; she put in
19 the best material; she had done it the right way.

20 As morning came we went out to survey the damage.
21 It looked like a World War I battlefield, but the house had
22 only lost one shingle and some screens -- built to last, the
23 right way.

24 The first job I ever had has been with me these
25 past weeks and months and year, remembering just do it

1 right, take it one step at a time, don't give up, remember
2 that there will be inevitable drudgery, as I remember from
3 my first job of cleaning a stable. But if you do it right
4 your employer will tell the next person that you did a
5 wonderful job and you will be on your way. In 1972 I ran
6 for political office. I tried to do and say and act on the
7 beliefs that I held dear, and I tried to keep at it. A man
8 who had been the only member of the Florida Legislature to
9 vote for a resolution ending segregation in the public
10 schools in 1956 was running for mayor of our town. He knew
11 he was going home to political defeat, certain political
12 defeat when he cast that vote. He was defeated and he was
13 out of office for fifteen years. He made a distinguished
14 comeback and was elected mayor.

15 But along those campaign trails he said, Janet,
16 just keep on doing and saying what you believe to be right.
17 Don't pussyfoot, don't equivocate, don't talk out of both
18 sides of your mouth, and you'll wake up the next morning
19 feeling good about yourself. But if you pussyfoot and
20 equivocate, and you try to be Miss Popularity, you'll wake
21 up the next morning feeling miserable. Well, I woke up the
22 next morning not feeling entirely good because I had lost
23 my election. Somebody, however, had put a biography of
24 Abraham Lincoln on my bedside table. It helped to know that
25 Lincoln had lost his first election.

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1 When you lose in the future, just keep coming
2 back. But more importantly, I knew what John Orr had taught
3 me, and I knew that I could try to do and say what I
4 believed to be right. And I generally felt pretty good
5 about it in the end.

6 Public service comes back through my mind. This
7 College has a distinguished tradition of encouraging public
8 service, of reaching out to the community, of caring, of
9 giving as much as it gets. But I remember the people, the
10 lady who had no more than a high school education who headed
11 the welfare department and took care of indigent children
12 who could not help themselves, mentally ill people and
13 homeless people and drunks found at the side of the road;
14 reach out and help.

15 I remember the English professor who could read
16 Keats as if it were the most magical language in the world,
17 and that language and his voice have been in my ears during
18 these weeks and months.

19 But there are harsh moments. I remember the angry
20 crowds that rioted in Miami because my prosecutors had lost
21 an important case. They burned, they rioted, they demanded
22 that I leave office. But I kept talking to the community,
23 coming back and talking. And when it came time for the
24 president to consider whether to appoint me, the people who
25 had condemned me and criticized me and tried to make me

1 leave office were some of my biggest supporters.

2 There will be angry crowds, there will be
3 dissention, there will be disagreement in your life, but
4 never give up. Keep coming back in the spirit of good will
5 and good faith, never tolerating evil, but always trying to
6 find the best in people.

7 And so I urge you as you start on this great
8 adventure to stop and cherish the land you love and be at
9 one with it. For you, it may be this area or another; for
10 me it's the Everglades that make it so wonderful to go home
11 to. Stop and cherish the small old words and stories and
12 traditions and tales that are so important to all our
13 people.

14 Stop and laugh at yourself, and if you can't laugh
15 at yourself, find a brother like mine who will immediately,
16 even if you are Attorney General, make sure you are not too
17 big for your britches. Stop and cherish honor and loyalty
18 and friendship. The friendships I have made since I
19 graduated from Cornell in 1960 have carried me a long way
20 this past year.

21 Stop and cherish the people you love and your
22 family. I think back to my afternoons as mother built the
23 house and she would always take time for us, teaching us to
24 play baseball, to shoe a horse, to bake a cake, to
25 appreciate Beethoven symphonies. She spanked us and she

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1 loved us with all her heart, and there is no job here in the
2 world that will ever be a substitute for what that lady was
3 in our life.

4 As you embark on this great adventure, remember
5 to put your children, your family first, and demand of
6 employers that they give you the opportunity to put children
7 and family first. And then most of all, stop and be
8 yourself and understand that life is not a matter of being
9 the Attorney General; life is a matter of being yourself and
10 enjoying this world for what it is, no matter who you are.

11 And then with the spirit and the values and the
12 heart and the soul that this college has given you, that you
13 draw from this place, go out and serve others in this world.
14 We cannot be an island unto ourselves; we must reach out and
15 form community. It may be a community in a rural area in
16 Montana with the person 15 miles down the road, it may be
17 a town, it may be a city of 80,000 like Billings, or it may
18 be a city of many thousands like Miami, but community
19 becomes an essential part of it.

20 And you in Billings and throughout this college
21 have demonstrated something to this nation that is so
22 incredibly important in terms of community. Your
23 community's response to the hate crimes of this past year
24 has made all this nation very, very proud. You did not turn
25 away. You came together reaching through so many

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1 differences to become one and to address the issue the right
2 way.

3 On April the 13th of this year, Police Chief Wayne
4 Inman was honored at the White House for his response to
5 your community policing. But at the White House, Chief
6 Inman told America, and I was there that day, the community
7 responded, the community is the hero. This entire
8 community, and my grammar is bad, are heros and heroines and
9 an example for us all.

10 You stood up and said, If you harass and
11 intimidate one member of this community, you are attacking
12 us all. You taught this country that hate groups must be
13 resisted and not ignored. I am so honored and proud to be
14 in a community that taught America what community was about,
15 that taught America what caring about others was about.

16 But we have more to do, and this college is
17 demonstrating examples of what we can do by the Festival of
18 Cultures which you will have here this June, in which you
19 teach all to appreciate the remarkable diversity of America,
20 the differences, the wonderful traditions, the wonderful
21 costumes, the wonderful tales, the wonderful stories. You
22 have given us much to follow.

23 But there is more to community. There is the
24 plumber who reaches out to the elderly person who is alone
25 in her own home, a bit afraid, and doesn't know who to call;

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1 and it's the plumber who checks and makes a difference and
2 follows up; it's the doctor who cares and reaches out and
3 makes the home call. Community is what it's all about.

4 But community extends beyond the city. It extends
5 to a state and the nation, and courage in the face of
6 frightening and immoral violence is not limited to the
7 people of Billings, the Chief of Police, or to your Sheriff,
8 whom I met this morning. We have seen examples of courage
9 in the United States Congress in these last weeks and
10 months. I have watched Republicans and Democrats stand up
11 and vote their conscience to do what was right.

12 Your Senator, Max Baucus, has demonstrated his
13 courage by supporting the Brady Bill and the assault weapons
14 stand. He stood tall under fierce fire from many people who
15 criticized him vehemently, but he stood up and voted his
16 conscience because he thought it was the right thing to do.
17 That is an example for all of us in public service, what the
18 Senator did, what others have done in voting because it was
19 the right thing to do and not what people would say. We
20 need more of that throughout our state, local and national
21 governments.

22 But as you learn from community, as you draw
23 strength from whence you came, we must look out for the
24 issues that will confront you and me and this nation for the
25 rest of our lives. We must make sure that your children

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1 have a land and a place to draw strength from, that we do
2 not tarnish, that we do not destroy the land and the water
3 and the air of this nation that we hold so dear.

4 You are a state that may be one of the fastest
5 growing states in the nation. I come from a state that was
6 that way a long time ago. I watched my Everglades begin to
7 disappear; I watched my coral reefs begin to be covered by
8 silt. You should pledge that you can bring your children
9 back to where you graduated from college and not only have
10 the sky at least as good, but better, and make sure that the
11 waters and the land of this remarkable country remain the
12 same or better. It is easier said than done. There are so
13 many conflicting interests over water rights, over air, but
14 if we work together and understand that it is essential for
15 this land, we can do it.

16 We must address our future in terms of our
17 children. We look at crime and we must punish the dangerous
18 offender, we must make sure there is prudent sentencing.

19 But we must make an investment in our children and
20 families. Unless we start an investment in children as they
21 are born, we will never have enough prisons eighteen years
22 from now to house all the children who were neglected as
23 they grew. Unless we invest in children and family now, we
24 will not have a work force that can fill the jobs and
25 maintain the economy and maintain this nation as a great

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1 nation.

2 Unless we invest in children now in preventive
3 medical care, our health care institutions will be brought
4 to their knees. We must prevent rather than wait for the
5 crisis to occur.

6 We must invest in people rather than just in
7 smokestacks and technology and automation. Nothing, no
8 computer system, no government, is any better or stronger
9 than its people.

10 But then we face an extraordinary challenge that
11 I did not face as I left college. We face a nation that is
12 now part of the world, a world where there is global
13 migration, global crime, a global economy, a global
14 information system that staggers the imagination in terms
15 of the complexity it presents for us in America today.
16 There is much opportunity within this information system,
17 but there is much conflict.

18 We have seen just in these last weeks, problems
19 of conflict that staggers the imagination as people reach
20 back to their distant past and bring back memories of
21 conflict and of hatred that have no place on this earth.

22 So I look to join with you as you leave this place
23 today, drawing from what has been so good to you, taking the
24 courage, the heart, the spirit that Rocky Mountain College
25 has given you and that shall be with you always. And let

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1 us all go forth from this place to build a stronger, better
2 world, a world that is at peace with itself and that cares
3 for others.

4 God speed to you all.

5 (11:37 a.m.)

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