



CITY OF MIAMI  
DEPARTMENT FIRE-RESCUE  
FIREFIGHTER GRADUATION CEREMONY

Friday, March 26, 1999

9:00 a.m.

KEYNOTE SPEAKER

U. S. ATTORNEY GENERAL JANET RENO

George Washington Carver

Middle School Auditorium

4901 Lincoln Drive

Coconut Grove, Florida

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

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Thank you,

Mr. Mayor. Thank you for welcoming me home, and, Chief, I just appreciate this privilege so very much because it is a high privilege and great honor for me to look at that graduating class and tell them how proud we are of you. We're proud of you for meeting the requirements and to admission of this great department. We're proud of you for the training you've undertaken and completed, but we're prouder of you because you are committed to a great position of public service, probably one of the most important undertakings that anybody can do for fellow

citizens and for people with whom she or he will come in contact.

This is indeed a great department, and I confirm what the Chief says, not as somebody coming from Washington who doesn't know the department, but somebody who watched the department over those 30 years make such a contribution to this community. You have stepped forward to serve others, and you will have rewards. You will save lives. You will have people come up to you later and thank you for saving their lives, thank you for touching them and caring.

But sometimes people will second guess you, and you may have an editorial written against the department for doing something by some editorial writer who has never been in the situation you have been about things you did wrong. But you will not remember those times. You will remember how you reached out and helped others.

You may not make a lot of money, but you won't remember the house you live in as much as the service that you provide to people in this community and from around the world. Look at your challenges and look at why we're so proud of you. You have put your life on the line. You know what you are getting into. You have been through training that prepares you for it.

It's not something that may happen casually. You know you're going into a fire driven building, but you're not just firefighters. You're engaged in prevention as well. The Chief touched on it. But this department has a great tradition, the fire prevention, and, again, it's not me coming from Washington to tell you that. It's a former State Attorney, watching as the Fire Department explained to me, what can be done to prevent fires in this community. Never ever forget that mission, and as you deal with fire, think what could be done to have prevented it, what was wrong, what materials are needed, what equipment is needed because it can make an extraordinary difference.

You may have to deal not just with the hell of fire but with a double hell of weapons that we cannot comprehend,

either chemical or biological in the hands of terrorists that would do things that we cannot comprehend. It is very important that this nation be prepared to cope with those situations, and God forbid they should ever occur.

You are going to be the first to respond. You are going to be on the front line. It won't be agents from the Federal Government. It will be as we saw in Oklahoma City, firefighters, police officers, people responding in chaos but with care and with compassion.

We want to work with State and local communities across this nation in developing a partnership, a partnership that will take the latest in research, the latest in equipment and technology and put it in your hands in an orderly way along with training and help prepare you for the extraordinary challenges that we face and the response to weapons of mass destruction.

It is very important that we make sure that you have the equipment and training necessary to protect your lives in the first place, so that we can then anticipate that you will save or minimize the harm caused by their terrible weapons if God forbid they should be there. I have talked with representatives of firefighters from around the country. I'm committed to doing everything I can to make sure you have the tools and the resources necessary to do that job.

For instance, firefighters who may be the first to respond in a chemical or biological attack need the right equipment to detect what kind of chemical or pathogen it may be. That is going to dictate how you respond, what type of medical approach is provided. We have got to work together as partners to make sure that we get to you, the first responders, the people on the front line, the people who are putting their lives on the line what is necessary to protect you and all of this nation.

But in addition to all of that, you have got to save people's lives day in and day out, and you already are walking into a situation where you will get more calls for

service than any other Fire Department. You have got to have an awful lot of knowhow in knowing this department. I know you have got that, but just remember, when you rescue a child, the tone of voice that you use, the kindness, the command, the understanding that you provide that child will prepare him for the future without the trauma and scarring, or it can turn him down the other direction.

You are going to be the first responder to violence, to tragedy, to so many different situations that affect all human beings and how you deal with it will make a mark on that person that will be felt for the rest of his or her life. You have such an extraordinary challenge because so many people look up to you.

Yesterday, there was a little boy in my office. He was five years old, and I gave him my fireman's hat. He said, I want to be a firefighter. I asked him why. He had stopped at the fire station about six months before and was fascinated by the firefighter, somebody he could look up to, somebody who could make a difference in his life and shape his contribution to public service.

You live in one of the great communities in the world. It's a little over 100 years old, and there is no other city in this country that has grown so fast with such diversity and with such magnificence in about 100 years. This community is integrated at this time with international aspects of all concerns, which are felt around the world. Crime is international in its consequence.

We are the center of trade, the

center of commerce for this whole hemisphere. We have created all of this together, one of the great international cities in the world, diverse and known. I have just recently been to South America again and every time I go, whether it's Brazil or Peru or Columbia, when I say I was born and raised in Miami, their faces light up and they say what a wonderful city.

And, yes, Miami has had its ups and downs like any young

person has ups and downs that they have, but when you tell people that you were born and raised in Miami and watch how they look at you and smile and say what a wonderful city, you're poised and you're going to be a part of the city that will be the beacon of the hemisphere, I think indeed the world, in this new century that we will soon enter.

You can make the difference by contributing to the community and to the bonds of community and in a way that Father Enghers spoke of, reaching out to others, working with the police, working with that activist, coming together using your time to reach out and care and build a sense of community that can make a difference.

I love this city. I love its people. I love what it means for so many. It means hope and freedom and opportunity. You undertake to protect that community. You undertake to protect the lives of us all, and for us all I say thank you from the bottom of my heart. God speed, and take good care of yourselves.

(Whereupon, speech is completed.)