



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

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REMARKS OF THE HONORABLE JANET RENO,
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES,

TO THE

ANNUAL AWARDS DINNER OF THE
WOMEN'S BAR ASSOCIATION OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
UPON PRESENTATION OF THE JANET RENO TORCHBEARER AWARD
TO REPRESENTATIVE ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON

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National Building Museum

441 Fourth Street, N.W.

Washington, D.C.

Wednesday, May 19, 1999

P R O C E E D I N G S

(9:25 p.m.)

GENERAL RENO: Thank you so very much.

The Women's Bar Association has meant so much to me. You have welcomed me to this city and made me feel a part of it. I have suggested before and I suggest now that the principal role of lawyers is to be a problem solver. You are great problem solvers. Your Woman Lawyer of the Year is a wonderful problem solver. Don't ever give up, don't ever let the Women's Bar Association go anywhere, until you have solved the problem of allowing a work place where both parents have quality time with their children and with what they want to do.

(Applause.)

I've never really had an award named after me or, if I did, I never had to present it.

(Laughter.)

And I feel uncomfortable doing so. So I'm going to refer to it as "The Torchbearer Award." It is very appropriate that I present it to the person receiving it tonight because she of all people was the torchbearer for me.

I came to this city and I was afraid I would lose my sense of community. At that point there were a rash of sniper shootings in the area around Raymond Elementary. Eleanor Holmes Norton, when asked her, what should I do, she said: Janet, come out there with me.

How do I get into the community, Eleanor? How do I not lose my sense of community? Come out there with me and adopt that school.

And we went out there before the sniper had been apprehended, and I have never seen a person that could talk so wonderfully to the children, to a police officer standing on the street, to an agent who was with me, to a teacher, to a public official. She was so calming, she was so peaceful. She has been my torchbearer ever since.

That was in 1993. Six years later, the nine year old that I

adopted is now 15 years old and in a high school and says: I remember you from Raymond Elementary; thank you for being a torchbearer for me.

She is someone who is truly deserving of this award. She is a torchbearer in every sense -- a bright light in Congress, a very fiery defender of the city and of the people she represents.

Sometimes public officials become a little complacent. They repeat things. Eleanor Holmes Norton never repeats anything rote. She repeats it with vigor, ferocity, and determination. And if you have ever been the Attorney General of the United States and the Deputy Attorney General of the United States called to meet Congresswoman Norton about issues affecting the District, you will know that she speaks from the heart, with passion, and she never gives up one bit of ground. She is truly a person who believes in and is a walking example of public service, as a member of Congress, as a professor of law at Georgetown, as Equal Opportunity Commission Chair, and as the mother of two children.

As we commemorate a century of firsts, 100 years of women making history, this evening, let me tell you about a couple of notable firsts in her career. She fought for and she won the right to vote on the floor of the House of Representatives, the first time the District of Columbia's Representative in Congress has ever had that right.

(Applause.)

In 1993 she led the historic debate and vote in the House of Representatives on statehood for the District of Columbia. It was the first time since the District was created that the House held a debate and vote on this issue. That historic day made the country award of the status of the District and its citizens, and she never lets us forget it.

(Applause.)

Ladies and gentlemen, this is a perfectly wonderful city to come to, a wonderful city to explore, for people to meet. If you are walking at 6:00 o'clock in the morning and somebody sitting on the sidewalk says "Hi Janet, how are you," you realize that it is still a small and caring city.

When a Republican Senator calls you and says, "You're not mad at me, are you?" you realize that it's a wonderful and caring city.

(Laughter.)

But one of the people that has made it so special for me and so special for the citizens of this District and the citizens of this country who come to visit, the most wonderful capital city in the world, is Eleanor Holmes Norton. She is hard-working, competent, absolutely intellectually honest. She won't let you get away with a bit of an illusion of the right. Able to get along with opponents as well as fellow partisans, willing to take personal and political risks in the long-term interest of her community and constituency, a splendid Representative, a splendid person.

You made acknowledgment of Amelia Earhart. I've never asked Eleanor about this, but I think she might say so, too. My mother helped push Amelia Earhart's plane out of the hangar at Opalaka Airport as she took off on her trip around the world, into the Caribbean towards South America. My mother was a little cub reporter who got the assignment because she got up early enough to go out on a Sunday morning to do it.

She said: "Ms. Earhart, why are you doing this?" "Just for fun."

Anybody that has a sense of spirit and a sense that public service can be fun, too, while at the same time retaining the fierce commitment to right deserves this award.

It is my pleasure and my great honor to present the Torchbearer Award to Eleanor Holmes Norton.

I think the inscription is so perfect: "With gratitude and honor for the light she has carried, the paths she has opened, and the changed world she leaves for all women."

(Presents award.)

(Applause and end of remarks at 9:32 p.m.)