



JAPANESE AMERICAN CITIZENS LEAGUE

36TH NATIONAL CONVENTION

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

by

ATTORNEY GENERAL JANET RENO

Saturday, July 1, 2000

held at the

Monterey Convention Center

2 Portola Drive

Monterey, California

P R O C E E D I N G S

(8:15 o'clock p.m.)

(Standing ovation.)

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Thank you so much for that warm welcome.

And, Lon, thank you for that very thoughtful introduction. You give me a lot to live up to. But I found something, a sense of the evening that you have caught and the young people have caught.

Lon did a wonderful job in Washington at the Agriculture

Department. His work now with the Cabinet here in California is so critical.

Norman Mineta said something about the coming of a force across all America. I think when you have people like Lon and Norm, I think you have become the force across all America.

(Applause.)

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: It is a special privilege and a great honor for me to join the Japanese American Citizens League at your 36th National Convention.

You have done something. Lon's getting a little bit old (laughter), but to have the Youth Council here and to honor them so specially, I think, is a great tribute and shows the insight for the future. Thank you for leading the way in recognizing that young people are our future.

(Applause.)

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I would like to acknowledge the leadership of your "Mom," Helen, and your Executive Director, John Tateishi. You all have made me feel so welcome, and I thank you.

You have some DOJ, Department of Justice, representatives here that are very important to me. Our United States Marshal for the Eastern District of California, Jerry Enomoto, is here.

(Applause.)

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: And the Marshal Service does so much for this nation in protecting the courts, the process, and doing so much across this land. I salute Jerry and I salute the Marshal service.

(Applause.)

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Rose Ochi, one of your former

National Vice Presidents, currently serves as the Director of the Community Relations Service of the Department of Justice. She has done a great job of leading CRS. And CRS, whenever it does something right, gets a little bit hurt in the funding process.

And Rose is right there fighting, realizing that through her leadership it has made a real difference in helping to resolve conflicts across this country.

Thank you, Rose.

(Applause.)

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: When you first come to Washington as Attorney General and you've never really worked in Washington before, and people say, Helen Thomas says to you the first afternoon in the Rose Garden, "What do you know about the federal government"; and then a man like Norman Mineta comes up to you and makes you feel welcome and makes you feel like you can do the job. And he has ever since, both in office and in the private sector.

I am just so tickled and so happy and so proud that you have been nominated. You are going to make a great Secretary of Commerce.

(Applause.)

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: The JAACL has long been a leader on civil rights issues, facing not just Japanese but all Americans. And I have admired that so much. From fighting employment and housing discrimination to fighting hate crimes, you have been a strong voice in Washington and across the nation.

That is the reason tonight that I would like to talk to you about our democracy and our nation governed by a Constitution that we think is a magnificent and splendid document.

For seven and a half years as Attorney General, one of the

great privileges and one of the points that I will long remember is the opportunity to greet ministers of justice, law enforcement personnel, even prime ministers who come to visit me at the Department of Justice to talk about institution building and the administration of justice in their countries, from Eastern Europe and the emerging democracies to democracies that are coming out from the shadow of tyrannies in South America.

When they come first they come with stars in their eyes. They're so excited. They've got dreams. They come back; they're a little frustrated. And sometimes they come back out of office and their dreams failed.

You realize with these people, who care so much and who have fought so hard and have put their lives on the line for democracy, that it is a very frail, a very fragile institution. But it is a splendid and magnificent institution and it is one that we should cherish. We must not take it for granted.

Ladies and gentlemen, we must use the creativity, the energy, the intellect and the patriotism in this room to nurture and protect our democracy as never before. We must learn from the past and act for the future.

We cannot forget that in the lifetime of many of us the government of the United States etched one awful scar across the face of liberty as it interned more than 120,000 Japanese Americans in what has been rightly called one of the most sweeping and complete deprivation of rights in the history of this nation.

On February 19th, 1942, President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066. That infamous Order caused Japanese Americans to be uprooted from their homes by their own government.

The words that were given to these actions, "relocation" and "evacuation," seemed harmless to some, even defensible reactions to the national emergency. But in reality "evacuation" meant banishment and "internment" meant

imprisonment.

Of those interned 70 percent were United States citizens and many were women and children. Some would spend long, wasted years in the camps, all inland, all in remote places, all bleak: Manzanar and Tule, Poston and Gila River, Rohwer and Jerome, Amache, Heart Mountain, Minidoka, Topaz.

No charges were filed against Japanese Americans. There were no trials, no due process, no justice. The ugly truth was that the sole criteria was their Japanese race and race alone.

And yet at the same time 33,000 Japanese Americans demonstrated their loyalty to the United States by serving in the United States Armed Forces while many of their families lived behind barbed wire. This happened in this country in the lifetime of many of us.

Several courageous young people became test cases for the constitutionality of the Executive Order. These people recognized that we have to fight for democracy.

The Supreme Court upheld these convictions, however, and the Executive Order. In his Dissent in the Korematsu Decision, Justice Robert H. Jackson summed up the tragic result, "The Court has validated the principle of racial discrimination. The principle then lies about like a loaded weapon, ready for the hand of any authority that can bring forward a plausible claim of urgent need."

As the War neared its end, Japanese American families slowly began to rebuild their lives. The chapter had ended, but the memory of the injustice they endured did not fade. It took many years of persistent effort to make our system of government respond.

The Redress Movement, like so many civil rights movements, began as a grassroots effort. The national organizations, including the JACL, were joined by numerous community groups and many individuals.

They worked so tirelessly and persistently towards the common goal of making this country acknowledge and atone for the grave injustice done.

I am proud of what the Department of Justice did in recent years to implement the Civil Liberties Act. Apologies were given; monetary redress was provided.

I am also pleased that we were able to provide some redress to Japanese Latin Americans who were brought to the United States during World War II in another tragic chapter.

But the Japanese American Internment stands for something else. It stands as a symbol that we cannot take democracy for granted. We cannot be comfortable that the rule of law, as we know it, will reach the right result.

We have got to make sure that the feelings of the Japanese Americans, the injustice that was felt, the horrible sense of the hurt that injustice compels will be turned forever into something that lets those that were interned, their children, their grandchildren and the lives they touch remember that even in this country it can happen.

It requires a constant vigilance. It requires an application of memory. It requires a commitment to civil rights. It requires all that JACL stands for.

We must speak out to press for the law that should be, not what the emotion or the emergency of a situation dictates. We must make sure that we are not, our voices are not stilled by indifference and laziness. We must make sure that we are not made quiet and moot by fear or intimidation.

When we see something wrong, we should just stand up and speak out.

(Applause.)

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: It hurts to find your cause beaten down, but you feel so much better having stood for what was

right. And what are the consequences if we don't?

I lived in Germany as a 13-year-old. My uncle was with the Allied High Commission Forces. And I had an opportunity to get to know many wonderful German people.

I asked them how Hitler could have come to power. And the more honest ones said, "We just stood by and watched it happen." Never again can we stand by and watch something like the internment happen. We have got to speak out.

(Applause.)

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: There is on the wall of the Justice Building on the Ninth Street side this wonderful inscription, "The common law issues from the people, derived from the will of mankind, framed by mutual confidence and sanctioned by the light of reason."

Our nation is a government of the people, by the people and for the people. And it must be built on something more than just majority rule and the rule of law. It must be based and built carefully, thoughtfully and constructively on mutual understanding, on tolerance and on an appreciation of the magnificent diversity of this land.

Without these values segments of our society will feel left out, alienated and apart. They will become frustrated and will lash out in anger and violence unless we reach out in mutual understanding and tolerance. No person should be left out. Every single person in America is important. And we must remember that.

There are too many that feel that they have come just recently to our shores and were not welcome.

My father came as a 12-year-old to Racine, Wisconsin from Denmark. He spoke not a word of English. Second-generation Danes teased him about his funny language and his funny clothes. He never forgot it. And in four years later, he was the editor of the high school newspaper writing beautiful English for the rest of his life as a reporter

for the Miami Herald for over 40 years. But he never forgot.

(Applause.)

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: He never forgot. And he was kinder, more tolerant, more understanding of all the wonderfully diverse people that walked through his stories over those 40 years.

There was the man who was drunk that lost his hound dog. There was the immigrant that came down the road. There was the man who had lost everything and had robbed. But somehow he could look through and see the best in human beings.

If we are going to make sure that every single person counts in America we have got to start a lot earlier than we do. Right now we wait until a child gets in trouble at 18 rather than making an investment in zero to three, the time when a child learns the concept of reward and punishment and develops a conscience.

What good are all the prisons going to be 18 years from now if a child doesn't learn upfront?

If 50 percent of all learned human response is learned in the first year of life, what good are Affirmative Action Programs going to be in college and law school if the child never got the foundation upon which to build in the first place. If we

(Applause.)

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Too many children are still dying on our streets in drive-by shootings. Too many children are left unsupervised in the afternoons and evenings. Too many children have too many things that need to be done to give them half a fighting chance to grow up in this difficult world.

If we are going to make civil rights a reality, if we are going to make sure that every person is given equal opportunity, we have got to start a lot earlier. And then

we have got to put the building blocks in place.

Health care. Good preventive medical care that can avoid costly tertiary problems down the line. Afternoons and evenings with proper supervision. Job opportunities.

As I look around at the Japanese American community I sometimes think I'm preaching to the choir, because you have a special and wonderful way with your children. But it is time that we look out across all America and make sure all American children have the same opportunities.

We have got to make sure that once a person has paid their debt to society, after having been convicted of a crime, that they, too, are people that should not be written off. We have thousands of people coming back from prison each year. We can either send them back to the apartment over the open-air drug market where they got into trouble in the first place, or we can give them support and assistance through re-entry programs.

We can avoid putting them down and instead lift them up and get them off on the right foot. If we don't, we're going to see the cycle of crime repeat itself.

But there are other challenges. If we are going to put people first in America we are going to have to make sure that the remarkable technology that man has created in telecommunications and in the cyber industries of this country, that that remarkable, remarkable phenomenon is put to work for the American people, to ensure its use in commerce, in communication, in education and enjoyment of the wonders of the world.

We can let it control us, or we can make sure we control it. I am going to bet on the people. But it is going to take a sustained effort.

If we are in a world where a man can sit in a kitchen in St. Petersburg, Russia and steal from a bank in Chicago, we realize more than ever that boundaries mean very little in terms of crime whose origins and consequences are becoming

international in scope.

As we focus on our communities, as we focus on our nation, we are going to have to start dealing with the world that is global in so many different consequences. And we are going to have to learn to build trust, to build understanding and to build processes that will make sure that the criminal has no safe place to hide and that we join together to multiply the benefits and the enhancements that every nation creates.

Yesterday I went to the Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation to talk about what more we could do to address the issues of domestic violence, youth violence, youth substance abuse. I saw a proud and magnificent people.

They said that I was the highest ranking government official who had ever come to visit since the last one, who hadn't been very pleasant, General George Custer.

(Laughter.)

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I shot basketballs with the kids, listened to some of their hopes and dreams, had one ask me how old I was, and saw again all over that democracy is a miracle, that diverse people from such diverse backgrounds can live together in a nation like this, can cherish that Constitution and adapt it to changing technology without changing its basic principles makes me so proud of this country.

But, ladies and gentlemen, let us never forget and let us realize that this fragile, beautiful institution will take every bit of effort we can muster.

When I was little my mother urged us to go into public service. She said we should fight hard to make the world a better place. When I went to Germany, I drove past Dachau and learned about it for the first time. I realized that things weren't getting any better, that the most horrible man in history, perhaps, had lived during my lifetime.

But then I thought about it, and I realized unless we try very hard things can get a lot worse.

Let us take the wonderful warmth and cheer and intellect and industry and dedication that is in this room tonight. Let us encourage the young people to public service. Let us go forth and cherish this institution of democracy and never ever give up.

(Applause.)

MS. MATSUKAWA: Thank you very much.

We have something for you.

(Applause.)

MS. MATSUKAWA: Thank you very much, Ms. Reno. We have a presentation for you.

Will Jerry Enomoto please come forward?

We certainly appreciate your knowledge of and sensitivity to civil rights and equal opportunity. Your job is not an easy one. Elian Gonzalez and Bill Gates, just to name a couple of the names that have been in the news recently. But you do your job with great integrity and dignity. And for that we are very appreciative.

(Applause.)

MR. ENOMOTO: Thank you.

Lon has covered the Attorney General's background and accomplishments much better than I can and very completely. All I want to do is add a brief personal word.

As an employee of the Department of Justice, I am proud to call Attorney General my boss. I think you can't do more than listen to the message that she delivered this evening to know who she is and what she is and where she is coming from. And I think we are all proud of that.

And on behalf of the National Membership of the Japanese American Citizens League, it is my pleasure to present this 18th Century Inari Bowl as our token of respect and admiration and thanks to Attorney General Janet Reno.

(Applause.)

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Thank you. It's perfectly beautiful. Thank you so very much. It is going to have a central place at the Department of Justice for me.

(Applause.)

(Whereupon, the Keynote Speech by U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno concluded at 8:40 p.m. Pacific Daylight Time.)

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