

Remarks to Justice Department Employees April 29, 1993

Thank you very much. When Janet Reno was confirmed, she said she never wanted to be called General, but only Janet. But somehow I feel I should call her General. She certainly seemed in command to me yesterday up on the Hill.

I want to say to all of you what an incredible honor it has been for me as a citizen of this country, as well as President, to be in the Justice Department for the first time, to walk down the halls and to see the wonderful work that was done more than 50 years ago now in building this great building during the Great Depression, when President Roosevelt was trying to lift the spirits of the country by putting the people to work—that's still a pretty good idea, I think; to walk into the Attorney General's office and see the magnificent portrait of Robert Kennedy, who was my favorite Attorney General from my childhood; and mostly just to shake hands with all the employees here. I think it is so easy for us to forget, in the ebb and flow of events when we were so focused on the moment, and easy for the American people to forget that every day there are so many Americans who could have chosen a different life, who get up every day and come to work in this building because they believe in simple justice and fairness and in doing right by the American people. And I want you to know that I appreciate that very, very much, and I thank you for your service.

After years of taking a different course, I am doing my best to turn this Government around, to change the way things operate here, to convince the American people that we are serious about the economy, serious about reducing the deficit, serious about investing in the real needs of our people, serious about providing fairness to the middle class and to others who are willing to work hard and play by the rules in America, and serious about trying to bring all the people of this country together again in a great national community in which we all recognize that we are in this together.

The changes we are making go well beyond policy and particular bills and, I hope, beyond politics to a whole new idea of hope in this country as we move toward the 21st century,

the idea that we can keep the American dream alive, preserve our basic values, and make the new future that all of you and your children deserve.

I thought about this a lot when I was attorney general, that when you work to ensure the full protection of the law for every citizen, you help to sustain the most fundamental values of democracy and, indeed, to provide for the freedom of all. I know most of you came here with similar feelings for the law. I have enormous respect for your motives. I come from a generation that revered the law because we believed it gave us the tools to help people and, in my part of the country, that it was the only instrument that would ever enable us all, black and white together, to live as equals.

I still believe those things. Today before I came over here, I had a whole string of people into my office who I had known for years and years and years, and they were laughing about how sometimes I may seem almost naive because I genuinely feel more idealism and hope today than I did in the first day I entered public life, than I did on the first day I cast a vote as a young man. I still believe that we can make a difference, that we can live up to the ideals enshrined in the Constitution, and that we have the obligation to do so. And I asked Janet Reno to become the Attorney General of the United States because I knew she believed that, too.

Since I became President I have spent a good deal of time trying to focus on law enforcement issues, because I saw all across this land in the last year and a half when I ran for President the enormous amount of insecurity and fear that so many Americans felt, living in their homes, walking on their streets. Many of you may have heard me tell this story, at least in the media, before, but one of the most gripping things that ever happened to me in the race for President occurred in a hotel in New York.

It was about a week before the New Hampshire primary. I looked like I was yesterday's news, to say the least. I was walking through this corridor to go to a big fundraiser full of people who wondered why they had bought tickets. I was feeling sorry for myself. And a man

who worked in the hotel as a waiter stuck his hand out and grabbed my hand, and he said, "My 10-year-old boy studies the Presidential race in school, and he says you should be President, so I will be for you. I'm an immigrant from Greece." And he said, "I will be for you because my boy wants me to be." But he said, "You know, where I came from we were so much poorer, but at least we were free." And he said, "Now when my boy walks outside from our apartment, he cannot go across the street and play in the park unless I am with him because he won't be safe. We live only two blocks from the school, and he cannot walk to his school unless I am with him because he won't be safe. So if I do what my boy wants me to do and I vote for you, will you make my boy free?"

And all of a sudden I couldn't remember what I was feeling sorry for myself about. But I did remember one of the reasons that I wanted to be President and one of the solemn duties of the Government of the United States and every other law enforcement jurisdiction in this country. And I think it's time that we move from the incredible gulf between rhetoric and reality to doing some very specific things that will make the American people safer. We ought to pass and sign the Brady bill.

I will propose a major new safe schools program so that children at least can be drug free and safe in their schools. I have just appointed Lee Brown, who was the police chief of Atlanta, Houston, and New York City, to be the Director of the Drug Control Office, the first police officer ever to hold that position, a person who pioneered community policing and actually can show how the crime rate went down in communities where there were enough police officers on the street to walk the beat and know their neighbors and work to prevent crime, not just to catch criminals after crimes had occurred. I have asked for more resources for drug education programs and treatment programs. And I want to increase police presence in our communities, so I've asked for substantial new funding to eventually add up to 100,000 more police officers on our streets.

Some of them will come, I hope, through the crime bill that I hope we can pass this year that was filibustered last year. That's a thing, institution, I've learned to have less and less respect for as we go along. [Laughter] Some of them will come from incentives we give, from

people coming out of the service as we build down our armed services and give people incentives to move into police or teaching. Some of them will come from the national service corps, which we will announce tomorrow in New Orleans, as people who will pay off their college loans by working as police officers. I had hoped that some would come from the jobs program, which contained \$200 million for more police officers. But we are going to work together to do this. When I sat in the Attorney General's office just a few moments ago, it's the second issue she brought up. She said, we've still got to deliver for the American people. We have to give them the police officers they need and the security they need. And we're going to do it.

I also want our Government to set an example. I want us to have a tougher child support enforcement program. I've asked my appointees to adhere to the strictest ethics law ever applied to executive branch appointees. I have cut my own White House staff and begun a Governmentwide review of every program we operate, so that we can show the American people we are trying to be accountable and responsible and effective and that we're trying to make sure that when we do something in Washington, it's for the good of the people out there who pay the bills and not just for ourselves.

Our country is great because we have succeeded over 200 years in providing opportunity to all, freedom of speech and worship and association to all, providing equal justice to all. We have become the custodian of freedom's dream for the entire world because people like you have decided to give your lives to this great call.

My goals for this Justice Department are simple. I want it to be free of political controversy and political abuse. I want it to be an innovator in crime reduction and in law enforcement. I want it to create a genuine partnership with those who work with us in State and local systems of justice. I want it to set an example in the practice of law and in the protection of civil rights that will make all Americans proud. And I want the American people to believe that you are their partners in making our communities, our children, and our families safe again.

In closing, let me say how very, very proud I am to name these seven Attorneys General, Assistant Attorneys General, to your Justice De-

partment team. Some of them are new to me; some I have known and admired a very long time. At least one of them once sued me; shows you how broadminded I am. [Laughter] And I can tell you, I am very pleased that each of them has agreed to join our administration.

This may surprise you if you've been reading the press reports, but with these appointments, our administration has in 100 days nominated 172 people for consideration by the Senate. At the same point in their administrations, President Reagan had named 152 people, and President Bush had named 99. By any measure, we're doing a fairly good job in staffing up this administration with high-quality folks. And I might add, since I look across here I can't resist saying, a third of them are women, for a change.

Today when I walked through these halls and I went to the Attorney General's office, I couldn't help but remember that it was 25 years ago in this springtime when Robert Kennedy, by then a Senator from New York, was running for President and was subsequently killed, just 2 days before I graduated from college, with one of my roommates working in his office. It's impossible for me still, especially now as I think back across those 25 years, not to be moved by his memory and his work and the power of the example he set for all Americans, regardless of their gender or color or station in life.

I hope 25 years from now, another daughter or son of America will walk in here and remember what you have accomplished here and be moved. I believe the tradition of greatness here is still very much alive. I believe that Janet Reno and the team that she is assembling can bring it to life for all Americans. The American people want you to succeed in your work; I do, too. Working together, we can be proud to honor the tradition of the Justice Department by ensuring its great future.

Thank you all, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:12 p.m. in the Courtyard at the Department of Justice.

The President named the following Assistant Attorneys General:

Walter Dellinger, Office of Legal Counsel
Lani Guinier, Civil Rights Division
Frank W. Hunger, Civil Division
Anne K. Bingaman, Antitrust Division
Eleanor Dean Acheson, Office of Policy Development
Sheila Foster Anthony, Office of Legislative Affairs
Gerald Torres, Environment and Natural Resources Division

Biographies of the nominees were made available by the Office of the Press Secretary.

Remarks at a Reception for the President's Health Care Task Force and an Exchange With Reporters

April 29, 1993

The President. Thank you very much. Let me say how pleased I am that one of the things that even people who care about health care can't control, the weather, cooperated with us today. How delighted we are to have you here to just say a simple thank you for all the work you've done.

I have a few other things I want to say, but I think I should begin by introducing the First Lady by way of saying that 10 years ago we tried this once before when I was Governor of our State. And it was obvious that we needed to dramatically overhaul our education system, and I asked her to chair this committee. And

she looked at me as if I had lost my mind because we knew we had to make everybody in the State mad to do what needed to be done. And it turned out to be all right. We had to change a lot of things, but it was one of those remarkable moments in history when all the people were ahead of all the policy-makers.

I think we may be there again with health care. And I think that if all of this works I will be once again indebted to my wonderful wife and all of you. And I just want you to know that she has sung your praises to the Moon from the beginning of this. And so I