



Awards Luncheon

Conference 2000 Keynote Address
The Honorable Wilma A. Lewis
United States Attorney for the District of Columbia

Thank you very much for your very kind introduction, and my thanks to all of you, as well, for your warm and gracious reception.

I am both pleased and honored to be here today to join in celebrating the goals, objectives and notable achievements of this most worthy organization -- "Women in Federal Law Enforcement" - - and its members. I would like to thank ATF Director Bradley Buckles and Deputy Director Pat Hynes for affording me this wonderful opportunity to be here this afternoon.

Through WIFLE's advocacy on behalf of women in federal law enforcement, its vigilance in pursuing the hiring, retention, promotion and equitable treatment of women in the profession, and its various activities designed to enhance the visibility and presence of women in law enforcement, WIFLE and its predecessor Interagency Committee have placed a much needed spotlight on the great value that women bring to our profession, and have contributed immeasurably to the progress in law enforcement that women have made over the years. Your presence here today in such great numbers speaks volumes regarding the strength and vitality of this great movement -- a movement on behalf of women in the law enforcement profession that is no less necessary today than it was some 18 years ago when it started.

In preparing to share this time with you today, I took the opportunity to look at WIFLE's Web Page which contains a startling fact that certainly bears repeating. The WIFLE Web Home Page poses the following question:

Did you know that until 1971, women were prohibited from holding certain law enforcement positions in the federal government that required carrying a firearm?

We've come a long way, indeed. Today we can speak not only of women occupying positions that require the carrying of a firearm, but of women excelling in the area of marksmanship. Today we can celebrate, as reported by the Bureau of Justice Statistics in its last report, that in 1998 there were approximately 11,800 women in federal law enforcement positions, comprising about 14.2% of the federal law enforcement population -- the highest percentage ever. This percentage is also consistent with the percentage of women in all law enforcement positions.

I hasten to add the obvious, however -- that is, that while progress is being made, we clearly have a very long way to go. There is much more work to be done. And for that reason, I echo WIFLE's proclamation that "women in federal law enforcement face challenges today as great as those faced yesterday." Borrowing from the words of Mary McLeod Bethune -- educator, civil rights reformer, and federal government official -- we women in federal law enforcement must continue to "believe in ourselves and in our possibilities." Yes, we must remain focused, committed and undeterred in our continuing pursuit to ensure that women occupy their rightful place in our profession -- both within the ranks and within the leadership circles. With organizations like WIFLE and your continuing support for its efforts, I am confident that forward progress will continue to be made.

I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate those individuals whom this organization has chosen to honor as award recipients today. Too often, we fail to take time out of our busy schedules to recognize those whose tireless efforts, commitment to duty and noteworthy achievements should stand as a model and as an inspiration for us all. I am particularly pleased -- as I know all of you are -- to have the opportunity to celebrate the individual accomplishments of each of our award recipients here today, and to share in the joy and pride that we should all feel as we applaud the professional achievements of members of our law enforcement family. My heartiest congratulations to each of you and best wishes for your continued success.

As I pondered your theme for this year's conference -- "Women in Federal Law Enforcement: A New Vision for the 21st Century" -- I found myself thinking that this "new vision" of which we speak should hold fast to certain old and basic principles, while at the same time making room for, and embracing new approaches and ideas. Thus, our "new vision", in my

view, should start by reaching back into the 20th century and bringing forward into the 21st century certain basic principles and ideals upon which our service in this profession should be grounded. I start, therefore, with the concept of public service and our role as public servants.

I have always considered it a great privilege and honor to serve, and indeed, to have spent the greater portion of my 18-year career as a public servant. While some may scoff at the chivalrous notion of duty and service, there can be no question but that public service is a high calling indeed. As President Woodrow Wilson so eloquently stated during a 1912 Presidential campaign address:

"There is no cause half so sacred as the cause of a people. There is no idea so uplifting as the idea of the service of humanity."

And, as we in law enforcement serve humanity by keeping the peace, righting the wrongs, and helping to ensure "liberty and justice for all," we should continue to do so with a full appreciation for the significance of our role, the awesome nature of our responsibility, and the tremendous honor that it is to serve the public. While we work in various functions and perform myriad duties, the touchstone of our very existence is the fact that we are service providers to the people of our communities and of this nation -- a distinction and a responsibility, I dare say, that are unparalleled in any other sector of our society.

Accordingly, as we perform our various responsibilities in the law enforcement arena in the 21st century, we must continue to do so with the kind of dignity, honor, integrity, pride, distinction, and commitment to public service that is befitting of our status as representatives of the United States. While we must keep abreast of, and take advantage of, the ever-increasing technological advances that continue to expand our knowledge and our horizons, we must always appreciate that there are certain intangible qualities -- so important to us as public servants -- for which technology can never provide a viable substitute. Yes, while the science of palm pilots, the Internet, e-mails, information downloads and the like allow us more ready access to information and equip us with the ability to do things more quickly, we will never build a computer chip that can be substituted for your honesty and integrity. Nor are there any computer chips that can substitute for the pride that you bring to your work, the courage that you exhibit, the

camaraderie that you develop and the code of honor that binds you. Computer chips also cannot be substituted for your selfless devotion to duty and your unerring commitment to public service. No, there are no such computer chips. These are qualities that come from within, which are indispensable in our role as public servants, and must be inherent in our service.

In this regard, I am reminded of the words of General Douglas MacArthur, who in 1962, returned to a West Point commencement, long after his military career had ended and shortly before his death. At that time when he spoke of these same intangibles in the context of "duty, honor, and country," it was this soldier of one era, imparting wisdom to those of the next who said, that it is these things which:

. . . make you strong enough to know when you are weak, and brave enough to face yourself when you are afraid. They teach you . . . not to substitute words for action; not to seek the path of comfort, but to face the stress and spur of difficulty and challenge; to learn to stand up in the storm, but to have compassion on those who fall; to master yourself before you seek to master others; to have a heart that is clean, a goal that is high; to learn to laugh, yet never forget how to weep; TO REACH INTO THE FUTURE, YET NEVER NEGLECT THE PAST . . .

So simple yet so eloquently stated, and as applicable in the 21st century as in the 20th. As we enter the 21st century, we must hold fast to these principles -- ensuring that our personal commitment does not wane; that our integrity never falters; and that in our service to our community and our country, we continue to demand the kind of excellence of ourselves and of each other that will make our service not only personally rewarding, but enriching for the people whom we serve.

But our role as public servants is but the foundation -- albeit an important one -- upon which we must build. As we stand on the dawn of a new century, we are fortunate to live and work at a very unique point in history. Our nation is at a position of unheralded productivity. We have been blessed as a strong and capable country, and while international issues continue to press our resolve, we have confidence in our ability to address these issues, confront our enemies, and further the national will. Though targeted by many, our country remains an example of a democracy

which works, a tribute to the rights and privileges of others, and a testament to a group of people who continue to believe that we can indeed work, live and excel together. The United States Capitol which is just a stone's throw from here is the national symbol of what we have been able to accomplish as a Nation. And today, there is no better example of what it means to serve a "government of the people, by the people, [and] for the people."

The world has changed, but in many ways we are fortunate to be in a world which I believe is better today than it was yesterday. We have recently experienced an unprecedented decrease in crime. The law enforcement community and citizens have joined forces in unique and innovative ways to make and keep our community safer.

While we can all rejoice in the lives which have been saved and the streets which have been made safer, our work is far from over. We must continue to ask just "how and where" we fit within the community that we are here to serve. And, we must continue to answer that question by recognizing the critical importance of reconnecting law enforcement to that community; the critical importance of really understanding that community and its needs. We must develop a connection and an understanding that allows us to appreciate that our public service goes beyond the boundaries of the particular areas that we patrol or the specific cases that we handle into areas like prevention and intervention. Yes, there are schools to adopt and children to tutor and mentor; and we in law enforcement can play an important role there as well. We must develop a connection and understanding that allows us to appreciate the interconnectedness of our work with that of others, and the fact that our work affects others we may not see, people we may not meet, and issues we may never contemplate. We must be ever mindful of the fact that we remain vital as public servants and effective in our law enforcement efforts only so long as we move beyond the checking of boxes on a statistics sheet and are really committed to and engaged in actually solving problems and making things better. We remain vital as public servants and effective in our law enforcement efforts only so long as we avoid viewing our role in isolation, but rather as part of a more comprehensive, collaborative effort aimed at improving the overall quality of life for the people that we serve. And embracing that fact means that we in law enforcement must continue to work with others outside of the law enforcement community, including the residents of the community that

we serve, to build partnerships and seek new and innovative solutions designed to create a community that will be better tomorrow than it is today.

As the United States Attorney here in D.C., I always take great pride in talking about our appropriately aggressive prosecutorial posture as it relates to dealing with criminal activity in the District of Columbia. I take an equal amount of pride, however, in letting people know about: our community prosecution approach, which focuses, among other things, on connecting our prosecutors to the community and building partnerships with the residents of the community that we serve; about our participation in the Department of Justice's Weed and Seed program that focuses on aggressive law enforcement as well as the rehabilitation and revitalization of communities; about our adoption of Amidon Elementary School and the tutoring and mentoring programs that we conduct at that school; about our partnership with the National Guard and the "I Have A Dream Foundation" to sponsor and administer the "Drug Education for Youth" summer camp and year-long mentoring program; and about our partnership with the Metropolitan Police Department and ATF in our gun violence reduction program that includes a school program component and a community outreach component. As we look toward the 21st century, we in law enforcement must broaden our focus and continue to look creatively for opportunities to pursue precisely those types of goals and objectives that I found on WIFLE's Web Page: enhancing the image of law enforcement in the communities we serve; promoting the value of collaborative & Cooperative leadership; conducting outreach campaigns and establishing dialogues with diverse communities; and examining how law enforcement can better serve communities.

Lastly, our vision for the 21st century should also focus on the importance of the trails that we are blazing for those who will come behind us. As we seek, for example, to promote the recruitment of more women into federal law enforcement, we cannot underestimate the potential power of our positive influence on our young people. When a young college intern was leaving my office some time ago, she wrote me a card that read as follows:

"You are an inspiration ... Not only to other aspiring attorneys, but to young ... women like myself, who want to be successful, who want to bear the fruits of hard work like you did. Even when you least expect it, you are

being observed, not by the press, but by younger, less experienced versions of you...."

We must remember that young people look up to us not only for guidance and assistance, but for role models whom they can emulate. Being effective in law enforcement is not just about making the arrest and getting the conviction. It's about being fair and honest, having integrity and honor, caring about the communities we serve and making a long-lasting positive difference in those communities. In short, it's about creating a positive example for others to follow.

Because you see, it's all about bridge building. In the words of the poet, Will Allen Dromgool, in his poem "The Bridge Builder":

An old man traveling life's highway,
came at evening cold and gray,
to a chasm vast, wide and steep,
with water running cold and deep.
The old man crossed in the twilight dim,
The swollen stream had no fears for him
But he turned when safe on the other side
And built a bridge to span the tide

Old man, said a fellow-pilgrim near,
You're wasting your time building here
Your journey will end with the ending day,
You never again will pass this way,
You have crossed this chasm deep and wide,
Why build you this bridge at eventide?

The builder lifted his old gray head.
Good friend, in the path I've come, he said,
There follows after me today
A youth whose steps must pass this way.
This chasm that means as naught to me
To this fair-haired youth might a pitfall be.
He too must pass in the twilight dim
Good friend, I'm building this bridge for him.

I thank you all!