

REMARKS
AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY

OF

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PRINCIPAL DEPUTY ASSISTANT ATTORNEY GENERAL
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AT THE

NATIONAL CRIME VICTIMS' SERVICE AWARDS CEREMONY

ON

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WASHINGTON, DC

Thank you, Darlene [Hutchinson]. And thank you for your outstanding leadership of the Office for Victims of Crime, and for the hard work you and your team do, every day, to support crime victims.

It's an honor to be here, and a privilege to join Darlene and Deputy Attorney General [Rod] Rosenstein as we recognize these exceptional individuals and teams for their service to crime victims. It's also an honor to welcome an icon in the victims' rights field and one of the Justice Department's greats. Attorney General [Ed] Meese, we're very glad that you could be here with us today.

I'd like to congratulate our honorees, and express my deep appreciation for the work that everyone here today is doing to balance the scales of justice. During my days as a U.S. Attorney, I oversaw scores of cases involving child victims, many of them involving unspeakable acts of violation and violence. I discovered quickly that the criminal justice system's response could be either a positive step toward building resilience, or an extension of the terrible trauma they had already suffered. When we connect victims with quality services, delivered by compassionate and committed providers, and give them a voice in the criminal justice systems, victims can begin a successful path to recovery.

Victims have better access to services today, and greater standing in our legal system, than at any time in our nation's history. And if these 13 recipients are a reflection of the kind of help being provided, we can rest assured that crime victims are in good hands. We should follow the example of today's honorees, who have widened the scope of what is possible in meeting the needs of victims. They inspire us by their good works, and they encourage us by their spirit of selflessness. We are proud to honor them today.

It is now my honor to introduce our next speaker. As a long-time federal prosecutor, the man who is the Justice Department's second-ranking official has built a distinguished career as a dedicated crime-fighter. I had the privilege of serving alongside Rod Rosenstein when we were both U.S. Attorneys a decade ago. His reputation for vigilance in the pursuit of justice was second to none, and that reputation has followed him to Washington.

During his service as Deputy Attorney General, he has led the Department's efforts to reduce crime and improve public safety. Rates of crime and violence have declined over the course of this Administration after two years of alarming spikes in 2015 and 2016. And his vision of public safety places victims in the center. His commitment to the safety of our nation's communities is strong, and he has been a steadfast supporter of our work at the Office of Justice Programs. It's an honor to join him today. Please give a warm welcome to Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein.

Special Presentation to Former Attorney General Edwin Meese III:

It is now my great privilege to present our first award. We heard from the Deputy Attorney General about the challenges crime victims faced in the 70s and 80s – both in terms of their rights in court and the lack of services that were available. The crime victims’ rights movement began, of course, at the grassroots level, but it received a tremendous boost during the Reagan Administration, thanks especially to the man we are about to honor.

After serving as chief of staff for California governor Ronald Reagan, where he advised on criminal justice matters, Ed Meese followed President Reagan to the White House in 1981. He was serving as counselor when a presidential task force was appointed to look into ways the federal government could tackle the problem of violent crime in America. He noticed something troubling in what the task force was hearing from witnesses: With disturbing consistency, people who had been victimized reported being treated, by the justice system and by society at large, with an almost callous disregard. They were all but ignored in the courtroom, they said, and they had very few places where they could turn to get the help and the financial support they needed.

Counselor Meese saw this as a grave injustice and a moral calamity, so he conferred with the chair of the task force’s subcommittee on victims – the late Frank Carrington – and they proposed that the President create a new task force, one dedicated solely to the issues facing crime victims. My distinguished predecessor at OJP, Judge Lois Haight, was appointed chair of the task force. She and her fellow members traveled the country to hear from crime victims and other stakeholders, first-hand, the challenges that they faced. Ed Meese gave his personal attention to their efforts, even while he held on to his many domestic policy and national security responsibilities.

The task force issued its final report in December of 1982, and that report was the launching pad for a number of revolutionary developments, including the enactment of the Victims of Crime Act and development of the Crime Victims Fund two years later, as well as the creation of our own Office for Victims of Crime. Most importantly, it helped fundamentally change the nation’s attitude about crime victims and how they should be treated.

Ed Meese would, of course, go on to become the 75th Attorney General of the United States, and he would remain a stalwart champion of victims’ rights and the federal government’s chief supporter of victim services. In 2006, more than two decades after these landmark events, Attorney General Meese was testifying before the Senate about the importance and the integrity of the Crime Victims Fund.

He is, indeed, a legend in the field, and so it is appropriate that we honor him today with the first Victim Rights Legend Award and invite him to share a few words of wisdom.

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