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SPEECH BY:

ROBERT MORGAN
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF NORTH CAROLINA

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AMERICANS, AS WE ALL KNOW, ARE NOT A HOMOGENEOUS PEOPLE. WE OFTEN EXPRESS THIS FACT BY CALLING AMERICA THE MELTING POT OF NATIONS, ACKNOWLEDGING THE FACT THAT "NATIVE" AMERICANS ARE IN FACT THE CHILDREN OF WAVES OF IMMIGRANTS WHO CAME TO THIS CONTINENT FOR MANY DIFFERENT REASONS.

OUR EARLIEST SETTLERS CAME TO THIS COUNTRY TO ESCAPE FROM RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION IN THEIR HOMELANDS. LATER REFUGEES CAME TO OUR SHORES TO ESCAPE POLITICAL PERSECUTION. VERY LARGE NUMBERS OF OTHER IMMIGRANTS CAME TO THESE LANDS TO BE ABLE TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES THAT WERE NOT AVAILABLE TO THEM ELSEWHERE. AND STILL OTHERS WERE BROUGHT HERE TO BE THE LABORING CLASSES IN A GROWING ECONOMY.

THESE IMMIGRANTS CAME FROM ENGLAND, FRANCE, HOLLAND AND GERMANY; FROM RUSSIA, IRELAND, SWEDEN, AND ITALY; FROM POLAND, GREECE, AFRICA AND THE ORIENT. IN FACT, SINCE

1820 ABOUT FIFTY MILLION PEOPLE HAVE IMMIGRATED TO THIS COUNTRY, AND THEY AND THEIR CHILDREN MAKE UP A LARGE PART OF AMERICA'S TWO-HUNDRED MILLION CURRENT CITIZENS.

BECAUSE OF THIS HEAVY AND CONTINUOUS IMMIGRATION, THE UNITED STATES IS OFTEN CHARACTERIZED AS A CHECKERBOARD OF ETHNIC GROUPS. THESE GROUPS STILL CAN BE DISTINGUISHED WITHIN OUR SOCIETY IN SPITE OF THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE KIND OF OUTWARD DIFFERENCES THAT ONCE STEREOTYPED THEM AND MADE THEM RECOGNIZABLE, FOR OUR SOCIETY CAN STILL BE THOUGHT OF AS A COMBINATION OF DISTINCT ETHNIC GROUPS, GROUPS THAT CAN BE PERCEIVED BY OTHERS AS WELL AS BY THEMSELVES TO BE DIFFERENT BECAUSE THEIR MEMBERS ADHERE TO A CERTAIN RELIGION, HAVE A PARTICULAR NATIONAL ORIGIN OR LANGUAGE, OR ARE RACIALLY DIFFERENT FROM THE REST OF THESE ETHNIC GROUPS THAT TOGETHER CONSTITUTE OUR MAJORITY.

WE SEE THESE DIFFERENCES IN THE HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE WHO STILL FIND RELIEF AND COMFORT IN THEIR OLD NEIGHBORHOODS AND IN THE JOBS THEY SHARE WITH PEOPLE WHOSE ETHNIC IDENTITY - AND OFTEN WHOSE KINSHIP - IS THE SAME AS THEIRS. MANY OF THESE GROUPS FORMERLY ENJOYED OR STILL ENJOY A SEPARATE POLITICAL AND NATIONAL IDENTITY. TO AMERICAN'S IRISH, THERE IS STILL IRELAND, FOR INSTANCE. AND OUR IRISH, LIKE OUR POLISH, ARE PROUD OF THEIR ANCESTRAL INHERITANCE. IN A WORD, AMERICA IS CHARACTERIZED BY CULTURAL DIVERSITY. WE ARE NOT, AS I SAID, A HOMOGENEOUS PEOPLE.

OUR PEOPLE CANNOT BE RELATED TOGETHER BY PHYSICAL AND MENTAL FEATURES THAT ARE THE RESULT OF ANY COMMON HEREDITY AND CULTURAL TRADITION.

YET IN SPITE OF ALL THIS DIVERSITY, WE ARE ONE PEOPLE, ONE NATION, AND THE ETHNIC DIVERSITY OF OUR POPULACE, FOR THE MOST PART, MAKES LITTLE DIFFERENCE IN OUR NATIONAL LIFE. ALTHOUGH SOME OF OUR ETHNIC MINORITIES ARE STILL STRUGGLING TO ATTAIN ALL THE OPPORTUNITIES OF OUR SOCIETY, MOST OF OUR ETHNIC GROUPS HAVE BEEN ABSORBED INTO ITS MAIN-STREAM. GENERALLY SPEAKING, OUR NATION IS ONE IN WHICH RESTRICTIONS ARE NOT PLACED ON PEOPLE BECAUSE OF THEIR CREED, THEIR LANGUAGE, OR THEIR NATIONAL ORIGIN. AMERICANS HAVE PROVED THAT FOR THE MOST PART, THEY BELIEVE THAT EVERYONE SHOULD HAVE AN EQUAL ACCESS TO LIFE, LIBERTY, AND THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS.

SO IN SPITE OF OUR VAST ETHNIC DIFFERENCES, ALL OF US MUST ALSO SHARE A COMMON HERITAGE THAT CHARACTERIZES US AS AMERICANS, FOR WE ARE A DISTINCT PEOPLE; WE ARE AMERICANS! THIS COMMON HERITAGE, HOWEVER, CANNOT BE FOUND IN ANOTHER NATION IN WHICH ALL OF OUR ANCESTORS ORIGINATED, IT CANNOT BE FOUND IN A LANGUAGE WHICH ALL OF OUR ANCESTORS ONCE SPOKE, IN FOLKWAYS OR MORES THAT ALL OF OUR ANCESTORS ONCE SHARED, IN A COMMON RELIGION WHICH ALL OF OUR ANCESTORS ONCE BELIEVED IN, OR IN CUSTOMS THAT ALL OF OUR ANCESTORS ONCE TOOK PART IN.

WHERE THEN CAN AMERICANS LOOK FOR THE FEATURES AND CHARACTERISTICS THAT DEFINE THEM AS A PEOPLE, A NATION, AND IN OUR OWN SPECIAL WAY, A NEW ETHNIC GROUP? I THINK THE ANSWER IS IN OUR LEGAL SYSTEM.

OUR SYSTEM OF LAWS IS HELD TOGETHER BY A VERY SMALL NUMBER OF FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES.

THE FIRST OF THESE IS THAT GOVERNMENT IS FOUNDED UPON WRITTEN DOCUMENTS. THIS PRINCIPLE IS THE FOUNDATION OF OUR UNIQUE LEGAL SYSTEM, FOR ALL OF OUR LAW, FROM THE CONSTITUTION DOWN TO THE LOWEST GOVERNMENTAL REGULATION, IS A WRITTEN DOCUMENT THAT CAN BE ARGUED ABOUT AND ADJUDICATED IN A COURT OF LAW. AND EVEN WHEN COURTS ADJUDICATE DISPUTES ABOUT LAWS, THEY ISSUE WRITTEN OPINIONS. AMERICANS CAN ALWAYS FIND THE WRITTEN RULE UPON WHICH TO BASE THEIR BEHAVIOR.

THIS FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLE HAD ITS ORIGIN IN A RELIGIOUS BELIEF THAT IS COMMON TO ALL WESTERN PEOPLES. IT IS THE BELIEF THAT THE WORD OF GOD, EXPRESSED FOR US IN THE WRITTEN BOOKS OF THE BIBLE, IS A SUFFICIENT GUIDE TO BOTH LIFE AND SALVATION. THE PRINCIPLE IS THIS: "IF GOD CAN WRITE OUT HIS LAW, WHY CAN'T WE?"

AND FROM THIS IDEA COMES THE IDEA OF A COVENANT OR CONSTITUTION, THE IDEA THAT PEOPLE CAN GET TOGETHER AND FORM A SELF-GOVERNING BODY BASED UPON A WRITTEN DOCUMENT.

BOUND UP WITH THIS PRINCIPLE IS THE IDEA - WHICH GOES AS FAR BACK IN OUR CIVILIZATION AS ANCIENT GREECE - THAT GOVERNMENTS ARE INSTITUTED BY MEN, LIMITED BY THE DOCUMENTS THAT FOUND THEM, AND EXIST ONLY TO SERVE THE PEOPLE WHO HAVE CONTRACTED TOGETHER IN ESTABLISHING THEM.

OF COURSE, WE HAVE THE RIGHT AS A PEOPLE TO CHANGE THE CONSTITUTION UNDER WHICH WE LIVE BY CERTAIN ORDERLY PROCEDURES. BUT THE CONSTITUTION AS IT EXISTS AT ANY GIVEN TIME IS BINDING UPON EVERYONE AND WE HAVE A SACRED OBLIGATION TO RESPECT ITS PROVISIONS UNTIL THEY ARE CHANGED.

THE SECOND PRINCIPLE, FOUNDED IN A SIMILAR WAY, IS THAT RELIGION AND GOVERNMENT ARE SEPARATE. OUR FIRST SETTLERS AS WELL AS THOSE OF LATER IMMIGRATIONS HELD VARIOUS RELIGIOUS BELIEFS. MANY OF THESE IMMIGRANTS CAME HERE TO ESCAPE RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION. THEY COULD NOT CONSENT TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A GOVERNMENT WHICH WOULD THEN PERSECUTE MEN OF OTHER RELIGIOUS BELIEFS.

THE THIRD PRINCIPLE IS BASED ON THE EQUALITY OF ALL THOSE INDIVIDUALS WHO CALL THEMSELVES CITIZENS OF THE UNITED STATES. INDIVIDUAL LIBERTY AND EQUALITY ARE THE CAPSTONES OF OUR LEGAL SYSTEM. IN SHORT, WE HAVE, BY OUR BILL OF RIGHTS, IMPLEMENTED THE WORDS OF THOMAS JEFFERSON "THAT ALL MEN ARE CREATED EQUALLY".

AS ABRAHAM LINCOLN SAID, "MOST GOVERNMENTS HAVE BEEN BASED PRACTICALLY ON THE DENIAL OF THE EQUAL RIGHTS OF MEN ...; OURS BEGAN BY AFFIRMING THESE RIGHTS. WE PROPOSED TO GIVE ALL A CHANCE; AND WE EXPECTED THE WEAK TO GROW STRONGER, THE IGNORANT, WISER; AND ALL BETTER AND HAPPIER TOGETHER."

THE FOURTH PRINCIPLE IS THAT POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC WELFARE RUN HAND IN HAND. TO EARLY AMERICANS, SOCIETY WAS NOT MERELY A POLITICAL ORGANIZATION. IT WAS ALSO AN ECONOMIC ENTERPRISE. OUR EARLY SETTLERS, ALONG WITH ENGLISH MERCHANTS, WERE MEMBERS OF JOINT STOCK COMPANIES, AND IN NEW ENGLAND, THE TOWN WAS A BUSINESS ENTERPRISE. IN MANY CASES, CORPORATE CHARTERS WERE TRANSFORMED INTO THE CONSTITUTIONS OF COMMONWEALTHS. PEOPLE CAME TO AMERICA TO LIVE A BETTER LIFE, AND LIVING A BETTER LIFE MEANT HAVING THE RIGHT TO ENJOY THE FRUITS OF ONE'S OWN LABOR. SO OUR CONSTITUTION EMPOWERS CONGRESS TO REGULATE COMMERCE FOR THE BENEFIT OF SOCIETY.

AND FINALLY, THE FIFTH PRINCIPLE IS THAT PEOPLE CAN MANAGE THEIR OWN AFFAIRS BETTER THAN GOVERNMENT CAN. SO OUR GOVERNMENTS ARE LIMITED BY LAW. SOVEREIGNTY IS SHARED. THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT, THE STATE GOVERNMENTS, AND OUR LOCAL GOVERNMENTS EACH HAVE A SHARE OF IT, AND NONE OF THESE CAN INFRINGE UPON THE PERSONAL LIBERTIES OF INDIVIDUAL PEOPLE. THIS IS THE GREAT PRINCIPLE OF FEDERALISM UPON WHICH OUR NATION RESTS. TO US, IT MEANS LOCAL CONTROL OF OUR LOCAL AFFAIRS, A PRINCIPLE I HOLD ESPECIALLY DEAR.

IT IS EASY, NOW, TO SEE WHY PEOPLE FROM MANY PARTS OF THE WORLD, WITH DIVERSE CUSTOMS, RELIGIONS, AND WAYS OF SPEAKING, CAN COME TOGETHER IN A UNIQUE AMERICAN WAY AND FORM A NEW PEOPLE, A NEW NATION, AND YET PRESERVE THEIR ETHNIC DIFFERENCES. BECAUSE PEOPLE EXIST AS INDIVIDUALS UNDER LAW AND NOT AS MEMBERS OF ANY ETHNIC MINORITY, THEIR NATURAL RIGHTS ARE PRESERVED.

PEOPLE CANNOT BE DISCRIMINATED AGAINST LAWFULLY. THE GOVERNMENT CANNOT TREAT THE MEMBERS OF ONE ETHNIC GROUP DIFFERENTLY FROM THE WAY IT TREATS THE MEMBERS OF ANY OTHER ETHNIC GROUP. BECAUSE PEOPLE EXIST AS INDIVIDUALS, THEY HAVE THE FREEDOM TO SPEAK OUT NOT ONLY ABOUT WHATEVER THEY PLEASE BUT IN ANY LANGUAGE THEY PLEASE. BECAUSE RELIGION AND GOVERNMENT ARE SEPARATE, EACH PERSON CAN WORSHIP AS HE PLEASES. BECAUSE CIVIL SOCIETY IS BOTH A GOVERNMENTAL AND COMMERCIAL AFFAIR, PEOPLE FROM EVERYWHERE CAN COME HERE SEEKING ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES. AND BECAUSE OURS IS A SOCIETY BASED ON LAW, EVERY PERSON CAN FIND THE WRITTEN RULE UPON WHICH TO BASE HIS OWN CONDUCT, CRITICIZE THE CONDUCT OF OTHERS, AND INSTITUTE PROCEEDINGS AGAINST THOSE WHO WRONG HIM, WHATEVER THEIR WEALTH OR SOCIAL STATUS HAPPENS TO BE. IN A WORD, OUR LEGAL SYSTEM IS WHAT CHARACTERIZES AMERICANS AS ONE PEOPLE AND AMERICA AS ONE NATION.

SOME PEOPLE IN RECENT YEARS HAVE LED ASSAULTS ON ONE OR MORE OF THESE PRINCIPLES. BECAUSE TIMES HAVE CHANGED, THEY THINK THAT OUR PRINCIPLES MUST ALSO CHANGE. SOME THINK THAT A CENTRALIZED GOVERNMENT CAN MANAGE OUR LOCAL AFFAIRS BETTER THAN WE CAN. SOME HAVE TRIED TO SILENCE THOSE WHO DISAGREED WITH THEM. SOME HAVE ARGUED THAT OUR GOVERNMENT OUGHT NOT ONLY TO REGULATE BUT ALSO TO MANAGE COMMERCE. AND SOME HAVE EVEN SUGGESTED THAT OUR CONSTITUTION MUST BE ABANDONED AND HAVE CALLED FOR A NEW CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION.

TO THESE PEOPLE I SAY, "GO SLOWLY, GO SLOWLY."

OUR WAY OF LIVING TOGETHER IN AMERICA IS A STRONG BUT DELICATE FABRIC. IT IS MADE OF MANY THREADS. IT HAS BEEN WOVEN OVER MANY CENTURIES BY THE PATIENCE AND SACRIFICE OF COUNTLESS LIBERTY-LOVING MEN AND WOMEN. IT SERVES AS A CLOAK FOR THE PROTECTION OF POOR AND RICH, OF BLACK AND WHITE, OF JEW AND GENTILE, OF FOREIGN AND NATIVE BORN."

THOSE WHO TALK CARELESSLY OF DESTROYING THIS DELICATE FABRIC OR WHO BY THOUGHLESS ACTION SEEK TO WEAKEN IT SHOULD THINK AGAIN. "FOR NO MAN KNOWS, ONCE IT IS DESTROYED, WHERE OR WHEN MAN WILL FIND ITS PROTECTIVE WARMTH AGAIN."

OF COURSE, TIMES HAVE CHANGED. SOME OF OUR INSTITUTIONS WHICH WERE DEVELOPED TO PUT THESE FUNDAMENTAL

PRINCIPLES INTO EFFECT HAVE NOT WORKED OR ARE NO LONGER WORKING. AND IT WOULD BE FOOLISH TO SUPPOSE THAT ONCE FOUNDED, OUR WAY OF LIFE MUST NEVER BE CHANGED. OUR FOUNDING FATHERS DID NOT THINK THAT WAY.

BUT THE WORK DONE BY GENERATIONS OF HUMAN BEINGS FROM MANY NATIONS THAT HAS RESULTED IN THE AMERICAN CONSTITUTIONAL SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT DESERVES RESPECT, AND THOUGH WE CANNOT BELIEVE THAT INSTITUTIONS SHOULD REMAIN UNALTERED WITH THE PASSING OF CENTURIES, THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF OUR PAST SHOULD NOT BE FORGOTTEN AND THE GOOD IN THEM OUGHT TO BE PRESERVED.

"HERE IN THIS LAND, IN WHAT WAS A WILDERNESS, WE HAVE GENERATED A SOCIETY AND A CIVILIZATION DRAWN FROM MANY SOURCES. YET OUT OF THE MIXTURE OF MANY PEOPLES THAT WE HAVE TALKED ABOUT HERE TODAY, WE HAVE DEVELOPED UNITY IN FREEDOM AND IN LAW - A UNITY DESIGNED TO PROTECT THE RIGHTS OF EACH INDIVIDUAL WHILE ENHANCING THE FREEDOM AND WELL-BEING OF ALL.

"I WOULD LIKE TO SEE THIS CONCEPT OF UNITY IN FREEDOM AND IN LAW, DRAWN FROM THE DIVERSITY OF MANY RACIAL STRAINS AND CULTURES, PERFECTED IN OUR COUNTRY AND IN TURN MADE A REALITY FOR ALL NATIONS OF THE WORLD." (PARAPHRASED.)

I HOPE YOU SHARE THIS WISH OF MINE AND THAT YOU
WILL JOIN ME ON THIS "LAW DAY" IN WORKING TO ACHIEVE IT.