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**Remarks of
United States District Judge
Nanette K. Laughrey
Upon Her Investiture Ceremony
September 27, 1996
UMC School of Law**

CHIEF JUDGE BARTLETT: Thank you Judge Wright. Now I call upon Judge Laughrey for any remarks that she would like to make.

JUDGE LAUGHREY: Well, I do have a few remarks, but I think I will walk down to the lectern because I'm still more comfortable at the lectern.

The more things change, the more they stay the same. Brook Bartlett was my first boss after I graduated from law school. As he's indicated, he was Deputy Attorney General under Jack Danforth, and he mentored me as a young lawyer. Now in my last job, he's sort of my boss again, and he's already started mentoring me as a judge, and I thank you very much for that, Judge Bartlett.

I also want to thank Judge Wright for his kind words. For those of you who do not know, Judge Wright is the darling of the Boone County Bar.

JUDGE WRIGHT: We're not going to put that up to a vote either.

JUDGE LAUGHREY: I have always admired his wit and passion for life. I hope I can be half the judge that he has been. For those of my friends, though, in the university administration and state government, don't worry. I say that Judge Wright is a model judge, not a perfect judge.

Before we begin, I want to make something clear. I am honored to be the first female District Court Judge in the history of the Western District. I would like to clarify, however, that I am not the first female judge in the Western District. Judge Hays, a magistrate, and Judge See, a bankruptcy judge, preceded me, and they have been most gracious in welcoming me and in showing me the ropes.

You know, I have so much to be grateful for and so many people to thank. There's a current debate about whether it takes a village to raise a child. I'm not going to touch that with a ten-foot pole, but one thing is certain. It takes a small army to make a federal judge these days. I wish I had time to mention all of the people that helped me on this path, but I know you want to get home before Christmas. There are a few people, however, that need special recognition.

First and foremost, my students, past and present. They each carry with them a small part of me, and I a small part of them. They taught me something new every day and kept my enthusiasm for the law fresh. I have no doubt that my time as a teacher will be the happiest days of my career. It may not have been the happiest days of their career. I suspect that there are

some former students who thought they would never have to hear about civil procedure from me again. They were wrong.

I also have a special obligation to the UMC School of Law. Without public education, I could not have attained this honor. Public education has shaped the destiny of my family. My mother, Mary Ellen Laughrey, grew up in a sod house in South Dakota with nine brothers and sisters. Her parents were homesteaders, and life was harsh. Mom left school after the eighth grade because there was no high school nearby and her family was too poor to send her away for more education. She finally received her high school diploma after I was born. I am a first generation college graduate and a first generation professional because the people of California and the people of Missouri gave me a chance. I hope that I have served them well in return.

By the way, the year I graduated from law school, my mom finally earned her college degree. She was 65. After that, she worked another decade as a social worker for the Columbia Visiting Nurses. I don't want you to panic, though, I don't think I can last that long.

I would also like to thank Senators Bond and Ashcroft for their support and kindness to me in this process. I especially want to thank them for not holding my husband against me. I love Chris, a lot, but he was not always close to the Senators. I appreciate them rising above partisan concerns and letting me be evaluated on my own merits.

A special thanks, also, goes to the Senators' staffs: Jack Oliver, one of our students here, and Warren Ergman, and also to Harvey Tettlebaum and Bill Brown for their encouragement and guidance.

Congressmen Volkmer and McCarthy are not able to be here because Congress is still in session, but they have sent their congratulations. Congressman Volkmer has been a longtime advocate for Mid-Missouri, and this time he came through again.

I'm especially grateful to Congresswoman Karen McCarthy, a friend of many years. She sponsored my nomination in Congress, and, with our Senators, presented me to the judiciary committee. Her enthusiasm was unwavering, and she kept me going through some of the more frustrating aspects of the confirmation process.

There's one person, however, who was central to my nomination. Without the support of Governor Mel Carnahan, I would not be a Federal District Judge. Governor Carnahan has always reminded me of my father. He is solid, gentle, refined, and caring, a man of good character and good cheer. I am honored by his confidence.

There is one other person central to this nomination and every aspect of my life, Chris Kelly, my husband, best friend, cherished companion, master of rivers, and maker of dreams. He has always encouraged me to be my own person, even when it meant sacrifices for him. It takes a really powerful man to share power. What a guy.

Now, I hope you'll indulge me for a moment while I talk one last time with my students about the majesty of law, for it is not our wealth and power that makes us free Americans, it is our Constitution. There have been countries in their own time more wealthy and more powerful, but there has never been one more free.

My sister and brother-in-law recently returned from an ABA project in Ethiopia. They told me about a time in that country when law professors arrived at work and started murdering each other because they were of a different party or a different religion. By the end of the day, the bodies were piled high at the back door of the school.

Why not here in Middle America? Because our country has been blessed with a Constitution that tempers the ferocity of human conflict. It distributes power among a manifold of institutions and people so that no one can usurp the liberty of another. The judiciary is but one piece in the mosaic of diffuse power, albeit an essential piece. An independent judiciary similar to ours is found nowhere else on earth and at no other time in the history of man. We cannot forget what a treasure it is and the humbling obligation it imposes on us who are called to serve.

There will always be groups of people who try to undermine the independence of the judiciary. But as I get older, I realize that life is not as complicated as I thought. There is only one thing that is essential to an independent judiciary: judges who are independent. Regardless of outside pressure, each judge ultimately decides whether they will resist that pressure and stand alone. I did not take a pledge to support a partisan cause or to decide any case according to popular opinion. I did not promise a certain statistical record. My pledge is not to my family or my friends, or even my deeply held personal beliefs. My only pledge is to the Constitution that has served us so well. I can promise you nothing more, but I think it is enough.

Now, before I end, there is someone here whose job it is to stay in the shadow, but I fear I must expose him to the full light of day.

Roy Temple was my student several years ago. He later became Chief of Staff for the Governor, and he was my shepherd throughout this long process, and I have to confess I was not always a good little lamb. But Roy never lost faith and never stopped rooting for me. He has honored his teacher beyond measure. God bless you, Roy.

On that note, let me say goodbye to my good friends at the law school and hello to my new colleagues on the court.

Thank you all very much for coming. (Standing ovation.)

CHIEF JUDGE BARTLETT: On that stirring and exciting note, this ceremonial session of the United States District Court for the Western District of Missouri is adjourned.

