Editor's Note: After years of public service, Attorney General Grant Woods bid a fond farewell to his colleagues as he prepared for his departure from office in December to become a partner with the law firm Goldstein, McGroder & Woods. He also will continue his talk show on KTAR-AM. The following speech was given to the assistant attorney generals as their boss' tour of duty came to a close and another chapter in Arizona history began.

Over the years that I have been Attorney General of Arizona, I have given thousands of speeches. This is my final one. It is appropriate that this last speech be given before you, my colleagues, in the office. It has been a fabulous run and you have been the heart and soul of that run. I come here today to thank you for your work and support, to reflect upon what we have done and to think about where we go from here.

I came here believing that this office could lead this state best by fighting the fights of the common man. If we truly understood the average working man and woman of our state, I believed it would set our agenda and define our mission. I believe we have met that challenge. The people of Arizona have been our cause and, through the trials and tribulations of carrying forward their message, they have been our salvation. I believe it is because we understand each other.

The average woman or man in Arizona today doesn't expect much from public officials. They want to be told the truth and they want things handled in a fair manner. They want some perspective, so that we always remember that while we may do meaningful things in our jobs, they are not more important than the things that average people do every day. Most of what we do pales in comparison to raising a child or maintaining a relationship or sustaining a career. Their hopes and dreams are sometimes simpler and less complicated, but at the same time they remain more profound and significant. Our job is to represent them as they go about the important business of living their lives.

The people expect us to be fair. That means on the criminal side that we stand up for victims of crime and make sure their voices are heard. It means that some people must go to jail for a long time. Some must be executed. Some should be given another chance. We have had record successes in prosecuting crime, but always we have done it in a manner that is fair and respects the Constitution of our country. On the civil side, this philosophy has meant that we act differently than an insurance company when defending the state of Arizona, and there is a difference. Our bottom line is not money. It is justice.

The people expect us to be courageous and stand up for them no matter how tough the adversary or what the political consequences involved. In the past eight years, we fought the state's biggest and most powerful business and political interests on the things that mattered to them most. We confronted the oil companies, the mines, the utilities, the tobacco companies, the car manufacturers, the ACLU, the Chamber of Commerce,
the Republican Party, the Democratic Party, the legislature, the former Governor...I’m not sure we missed anyone. When we went after polluters, or those violating civil rights, or those placing economic profit over the public or an ethical good, they fired back with everything they had. And yet, we rarely lost. We beat them in the courts and in the legislature, and finally we beat them in the court of public opinion. Arizona is a far better place and its future more secure because of those battles.

Finally, the people expect us to be non-partisan. They could care less if we or they are Republicans or Democrats, Libertarians or vegetarians. They want us to call it as we see it and let the chips fall where they may. I am proud that we did this every time. When you are sick, you don’t look for the best doctor or surgeon of your political party. If you have suffered serious injury, you don’t call up the local political district chairman for the best trial lawyer in your party. You want the best professional you can find, doing whatever he can to do the job right. The public expects the same at the Attorney General’s Office.

After eight years in the trenches, I am ready to go home. But the battles must continue. Indeed, in two important areas, the struggle never seems to end. First, we must recognize that if our beautiful state is to remain that way we have to act affirmatively to conserve it. The special interests that pollute are powerful, and in our state, as in others, money doesn’t just talk, it screams. It is heard. We must be heard as well. Our air, our water, our deserts and natural wonders must be protected or the engine of so-called progress will destroy them. You can’t take a break from the environmental fight. You cannot declare victory. You must be vigilant or before you know it our way of life will be gone. What’s good for the special interests is not necessarily what is good for the people and the land they love. You must stand up for the people. You must fight for the land.

So, too, you must stand up for the civil rights guarantees of our wonderful Constitution. Many believed that it was foolish for me to talk of our state as a civil rights leader on the heels of the government of Evan Mecham, the passage of English Only and the rejection of a holiday for Martin Luther King. But, I knew our state better than its critics. I knew that to be an Arizonan is to be Hispanic, to be Native American, to speak Spanish or Navajo, to be Mormon or Catholic. In our state, they is we. Arizona’s greatness is rooted primarily in its diversity. We should celebrate it.

This state didn’t need to be educated on civil rights, it needed leadership that reflected its maturity instead of exploiting its weak points. I was proud when we opened the doors of this law building in 1991 and joined the march down Washington Street honoring Dr. Martin Luther King. It was symbolic and it was important. I was proud that we stood up for teenage kids who were being thrown out of their homes because of their age and when we stepped in for Spanish-speaking loan applicants who were being discriminated against by the state’s largest bank. It hurt me personally to come down on the cops in Chandler—officers we had worked with, defended and supported for all of my career. But what they did was wrong and we had the ability to stop it from happening again anywhere in this country. So we did it.

The cause of civil rights is basic to our freedom as Americans. If one of us is discriminated against because of the color of his skin or his religion or gender or ethnicity or age, then the sting is felt by all of us. Dr. King did not live his life—he did not give his life—so that 30 years later we would still be searching for his dream. We should have achieved it by now, but we haven’t. This is the Department of Law. His dream is our mission. It can be fulfilled. We can overcome.

Arizona is at an important time in its history. Record growth has brought record prosperity for most. But, there is a group that has been left behind. Arizona has done many great things for many people, but it has done very little for its most important demographic group: its children. This remains a poor place for children to grow up. We are at the bottom of every list you would want to lead and at the top of every list you would never want to be on. This must change. As prosecutors, we know that our choices are limited by the time these older kids reach us. By then, it is generally a matter of protection. We must institutionalize prevention as we have correction. We must support our public schools and teachers with our money and our commitment to excellence. We must educate parents on how to do a better job at parenting and convince children to stop having children themselves.

Arizona must begin to manage its growth. One project at a time, one acre lost each hour, our precious natural resources are fast becoming a memory. Nobody here wants to be another Los Angeles, yet we are marching seemingly inevitably toward that result. We have problems in our state today, but none that can’t be solved. I don’t know how you solve L.A.’s intractable problems of crime and gangs, traffic and pollution, de-personalization and despair. We can’t let that happen here.

So you have plenty of work ahead. I know you are up to the challenge. You have proven it time and time
again. I inherited a tremendous group of lawyers from my predecessor, Bob Corbin, and I thank him for that. You will have an excellent leader in Janet Napolitano. She will take you places I never could have imagined. I will look on with envy and with pride.

But, my work here is done. I am ready to seek new challenges, try new things, go different directions. I am ready, as Robert Louis Stevenson advised, to sit more loosely in the saddle of life. It’s appropriate, I think, after such a wild and fantastic ride. I wouldn’t have missed it for the world. We’ve all gotten older, our kids are growing up, we can’t do everything we could when we got here. But we’ve got these memories of all we have done, all we have accomplished, and they will stay with us for the rest of our lives. Marlene and I will always be grateful to you for your support, your friendship, your professionalism, your good spirit and for your love. It is returned in kind, today and always.

I began this adventure almost a decade ago quoting Robert F. Kennedy: “Some men see things as they are and say why? I dream things that never were and say why not?” I will end our time together with another quote. Bobby told students in South Africa: “Let no one be discouraged by the belief that there is nothing one man or woman can do against the enormous array of the world’s ills—against misery and ignorance, injustice and violence... Few will have the greatness to bend history itself; but each of us can work to change a small portion of events, and in the total of all those acts will be written the history of this generation. It is from numberless diverse acts of courage and belief that human history is shaped. Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope. And crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring, those ripples build a current which can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance.”

I think that’s what we did here. We dreamed big dreams and we made them happen. We sent forth tiny ripples of hope—on behalf of and for the common man—and crossing each other over years of energy and daring, they built a mighty current that flooded this beautiful desert with the peace and security that come with justice. I am proud of what we accomplished and forever grateful for the chance to be your colleague. It has been my honor to work with each of you. I will miss you greatly. Carry on.