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As a state senator in the 1960s, O’Connor voted to establish ASU’s law school. “It was a very divisive vote,” she recalled. “Many people in the Legislature said, ‘Another law school? We already have one. Why do we want another one? More lawyers? We have too many already.’”

Now that it bears her name, O’Connor said she looks forward to visiting often, and she joked about the responsibility she bears.

“It’s going to restrict my activities, you know, because I certainly don’t want to bring any discredit to this law school,” she said. “In my retirement, I guess I’m going to have to behave myself.”

Speaking to a group of first-year law students on Thursday, Nov. 16, she handed down a roadmap to success: reading fast, writing well and looking for opportunities to “make something out of almost anything.”

O’Connor, who’s been doing that her entire career, shared these highlights: Upon her graduation from the Stanford University Law School, O’Connor applied for a job at a Los Angeles law firm, where she was asked about her typing skills. “We’ve never hired a woman as a lawyer at this law firm, and I don’t think we ever will,” the partner told her. “Our clients wouldn’t tolerate it.” O’Connor declined his secretarial offer.

She worked her way into a job in San Mateo, Calif., by offering to work for free and share an office with the district attorney’s secretary. “No matter what your beginning is, you can turn it into something, okay?” O’Connor said. “It doesn’t matter if you’re not offered the keys to the White House on your first job.”

During her interview with President Reagan in 1981 for the U.S. Supreme Court vacancy, the pair talked about cattle, horses and building fences. “I think he probably put me on the court because he liked my ranching background,” O’Connor said.

The former justice said she wasn’t confident in her abilities to make decisions on the nation’s top court, and today, she still wonders whether her work sufficed. “I’m not sure I did it well enough because when I retired another woman was not nominated, and the number of woman on the court dropped by 50 percent, and that made me very sad,” she said.

O’Connor praised Crow, White and the Arizona Supreme Court, noting two of its current members clerked for her on the U.S. Supreme Court. ASU’s proximity to Phoenix, the state capitol, and to Arizona’s commerce hub is fortuitous, O’Connor noted.

“It’s with the help of a law school that many public policy issues in the state end up being developed and improved,” O’Connor said. “This law school is poised to become an extremely important part of the state of Arizona, and you can help by being involved in public service, clinical programs, helping people.” She challenged the students to make her and themselves proud.

“It’s great to be the first, but you don’t want to be the last,” O’Connor said. “Now that burden falls on you. This is the first law school to be named for a woman, and I don’t want it to be the last.”