SPEECH BY THE

HONORABLE JANET RENO,

ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES,

TO DEMOCRATS 2000

YOUTH LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

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PROCEEDINGS

[6:52 p.m.]

GENERAL RENO: I would have given anything for the opportunity that you all must be experiencing, and in a way I'm sharing it with you, because 5 months ago I was in Miami minding my own business and thinking I was going to start a new term as State Attorney in Dade County, never thinking that I would be here standing before you in this capacity.

My whole life has just kind of been compressed into 5 months, particularly preparing for the confirmation hearings before the United States Senate. As I look back over my life and think of all that's happened, all I can tell you is: Use this experience. If I had had it, I would have a lot better inkling of what I should be doing as Attorney General in dealing with Congress and the like.

I have a great sense -- never have I been so sure that we can make a difference in America, particularly that individuals can make a difference. I have been a prosecutor now in Dade County for 15 years. I have seen people ignored, I have seen politicians who did not trust the people, I have seen public servants who did not trust the people.

I have seen welfare programs that have been developed that I think spend more money on determining

whether somebody is eligible for the service than in actually providing them service.

And I wondered whether I was just by myself in thinking that it didn't make sense. I have been to community meeting after community meeting where people have tried to work together. When five Federal agencies would come to town, they would each have representatives there and one Federal agency wouldn't know what the other was doing.

There was a tendency of Washington to tell my community: Hey, this is the way you do it; we know better in Washington how to do things than anyplace else.

Now I'm in a position to watch other communities, to see what communities are doing about crime, about violence, about the problems that we face in America. And I am firmly convinced that we can make a difference. If we trust the people, if we trust the communities to be bold and innovative, if Washington gets flexible and uses its dollars in the right way, I think we can make a difference.

Let me speak from a perspective that I know something about in terms of policy and then let me throw it open for questions, because I've said again and again that students ask better questions than anybody, including newspaper reporters.

The first thing we've got to do is look, understand in terms of the crime problem that we can't build

our way out of the crime problem. We will never build enough prisons to house all the people who get convicted of a crime.

Today in America we do not have truth in sentencing. We see dangerous offenders sentenced to 10 years in prison, in many States they're serving only 20 to 30 percent of the sentence because we don't have enough prison cells to house them for the length of time that judges are sentencing them.

But then I come to Washington and find that probably 40 percent of the people who are in Federal prisons are drug offenders who are non-violent. I find people who are non-violent first offenders serving 10 and 15 year minimum mandatory sentences. I don't see enough money in the fiscal years to come to house those people for the length of time the judges are sentencing them.

I think we've got to establish clear priorities that say for the dangerous offender, for the career criminal, for the recidivist, let's put them away and keep them away, and let's make sure we have enough prison cells. Let's get State and Federal prison resources together and make sure we use them the right way.

But then let's understand that there are a lot of people who are coming out of prisons sooner rather than later. If you sentence somebody to 5 years in prison and

they have a drug problem and you let them serve 5 years without treatment and then you pick them up and put them back in the community where they came from, guess what they're going to be doing the day after they get back? Using again.

Far better that we approach it from a carrot and stick approach that says: Look, you've got a drug problem, everybody agrees, you agree; you can agree to treatment, you can serve 10 percent of your sentence and then we'll work with you in terms of drug treatment; we can get you detoxed when you first get in, get you stabilized, move you into residential non-secure facilities, then into day treatment, after-care; we'll work with you in job training and placement; you've got to agree to random drug testing along the way. And as you move out into the community, we'll help you. But if you mess up on the way, you're going to be facing some jail time; you're going to be coming back to prison.

And if we monitor it and work with them carefully and give them a real opportunity, we can get people off on the right foot.

Now, some people have told me drug treatment doesn't work. That's hogwash. I bet everybody in this room knows a recovering addict, knows somebody who's had a brush with drugs who's been helped. Yes, sometimes they

backslide, sometimes they relapse. But then the next period is longer. Each time they make better progress towards ultimately recovering.

One of the most rewarding things that I've had happen to me as a prosecutor happened about a year before I left Miami. A man stopped me at a downtown office building. He said: I want to thank you. I said: What for?

He said: You convicted me. I said: You're the first person that ever thanked me for convicting them.

[Laughter.]

And he said: Actually, your prosecutor convicted me. But what he did was recognize what my problem was. I had a terrible drug problem. My family had left me. I'd lost my jobs. I didn't have any health benefits and I couldn't get treatment, even though I was beginning to want it. I burglarized to get cash to sustain my habit. I got caught.

Your prosecutor got me into treatment. I have been drug-free as a result for 2 years. I've gotten my family back. I've got my job, and I'm never going to use again.

Other times I've failed. But sometimes you aren't able to treat somebody with cancer, but it doesn't mean you stop trying. Treatment, if it's properly done, can make a

difference.

But it's got to be done with common sense. If you pick a kid up out of an open air street market where he's living in a slum next door to the open air market and you get him through treatment and you do everything right and you get him into a job, but you send him back to that slum tenement, he's going to have an awful time resisting the pressure.

We've got to develop alternate housing sites that young people and other returning addicts can participate in renovating and in making drug-free and in maintaining that site as a good and positive place where they can live and thrive.

One of the other problems that we have to face, though, is a recognition that much of what we see in violence in America is stemming from family violence. We did a study in Dade County of the people who have been killed over the previous 25 years. We found that 40 percent of the homicides in the County in that time period related to husband and wife, boyfriend-girlfriend, ex-spouse arguments that resulted in a death.

We developed a domestic intervention program that has now flowered into a really fine domestic violence court.

It used to be that police officers and judges said: So what? So what if he hit her? It's husband and

wife. Now people are beginning to understand that the child who sees his father hit his mother comes to accept violence as a way of life.

We understand that violence is handed down from one generation to the next. We can cut into violence right there by saying that family violence in America will not be tolerated.

It doesn't mean you have to go to prison if you hit your wife. It may mean you've got to get into drug treatment, you've got to get into other programs, into conflict resolution programs. But we can intervene and make a difference.

One of the things, though: We start looking at a juvenile justice system around this Nation that is spread too thin. I when I first became State Attorney wanted to focus on the juvenile justice system. I was concerned. I looked at 16 and 17-year-olds, trying to build the best division I could.

Then I started looking at these kids' prior history: Mother, they'd never seen their father; their mother had become a crack addict; they had tried to help raise the kids, the brother and sister; he had dropped out of school when he was 12, become the drug dealer's go-fer when he was 13, had a prior adjudication for delinquency when he was 14, and now he's 16 and he's charged with an

armed robbery.

I might be able to help that kid, but I will never be able to help that youngster and all the youngsters similarly situated, because we'll never have enough money if we wait until it's that late.

So I started focusing on dropout prevention, and our grand jury, with us working with the grand jury, did a study on dropouts. I became concerned because schools were focusing on 10, 11, and 12-year-olds. That was too late. The youngster who had fallen behind in his reading level was losing his self-esteem. He was acting out in other ways to get attention.

We should have started a lot earlier. So I started looking at neighborhood intervention programs at the Head Start level.

But then something happened. The crack epidemic hit Miami in 1985. Doctors too me to our large public hospital to figure out what to do about crack-involved mothers and their babies. Should we prosecute them? How should we handle these babies, these infant babies?

It is a fascinating experience to walk into a neonatal unit and see a child who has not been held or talked to except when changed or fed for 6 weeks. He's not beginning to respond as a human. It's more like a little animal lying there, whereas a baby across the unit who is

terribly deformed as a result of birth defects, but whose parents are with that child around the clock, is beginning to respond with very human, wonderful responses. And you understand what nurturing and bonding are all about.

Now, it seems strange that the Attorney General is talking to you about infants zero to three. But what the child development people taught me was that's when you learn more than any other time in human development. 50 percent of all learned human response is learned in the first year of life.

The concept of reward and punishment is developed during those first three years. A conscience is developed. If that child does not have the fabric of society or family around him or her at that point, what good is punishment going to do 14 years later if the child never understood it?

Traditionally, the family has been the institution that has cared for the child prior to Head Start and kindergarten. Now, in too many instances the family has fallen away from that child, and we've got to think of other initiatives.

But the key for all American policymakers is that I as a prosecutor and other prosecutors and police officers around the country are coming to recognize that, unless we invest in children zero to five, we will never have enough money to begin to build prisons 18 years from now for

children who were so neglected.

Unless we invest in children zero to 12, we are not going to begin to have a work force in 10, 15 years that can fill the jobs, that can maintain America as a first-rate Nation. Our health care institutions will be brought to their knees because we didn't provide good preventative medical care for our children.

So as a prosecutor and as now an Attorney General, I think it's imperative not just that we develop firm, fair punishment that means what it says, but that we also develop prevention programs that look at the whole continuity of life and not just one particular point.

Head Start's great, but what happens after they get out of Head Start and into school and have nobody supervising them in the afternoon and in the evening? Civil rights programs are great to ensure against discrimination in education, but what good is an education going to do if you get killed on the streets of your neighborhood when you're 13?

I think it's time for America to develop a national agenda for children that looks at the whole continuity of life, that says we can do something about teen pregnancy so that parents will be old enough, wise enough, and financially able enough to take care of their children, that every pregnant woman in America will have prenatal

care.

You ask me: What is the Attorney General talking about prenatal care for? If you don't care about children or our future, just care about your taxpaying dollars, because for every dollar invested in prenatal care you will save three dollars in taxpayers' dollars around this country at public health hospitals for health care associated with problems arising from low birth weight that was caused by lack of prenatal care.

We've got to ensure good preventative medical care for all our children. You look out here under the shadow of the Capitol and there are children who do not have current immunizations. That's penny wise and pound foolish. We can prevent epidemics that are costly in terms of human life, future impairment, and a lot of dollars spent to deal with the epidemic.

Something is terribly wrong with a Nation that says to a 70-year-old person, you can have an operation that increases your life expectancy by 3 years and yet we say to a child who's the son of a working poor person who doesn't have health care benefits at his job, but makes too much money to be eligible for Medicaid, that you can't have preventative medical care.

We've got to provide educare in that age from zero to Head Start so that children whose families will have

neglected them will have supervision and the structure and the nurturing and the bonding that can help them grow as constructive human beings.

We've got to free our teachers' time to teach. We've imposed so many social burdens on our teachers, but they have an extraordinary educational challenge. Think of what's happened in the last 100 years: man to the moon, atomic energy, lasers, computers, high-speed transportation, flight, television, telephones -- an incredible burst of human knowledge, probably the greatest in all of human history. And the schools are fighting to even begin to keep up with it, and yet we impose the social burdens on them as well.

Let our teachers be free to teach. Let us pay our teachers salaries that will attract the best people at every age level. Let us provide social workers in the schools who can handle the social problems and public health nurses that can handle the health problems.

Let's develop teams around the schools of community-friendly, highly respected police officers, social workers, public health nurses, who go to the families who are served by the school to identify the problems and help these people become self-sufficient.

Let's engage in truancy prevention programs that make sense. Let's start looking at a child's aptitude and

interests and design programs that fit that aptitude and interest that enable them, through summer jobs, work experience, and educational programs in the schools, to know that they will graduate from high school with a skill that can enable them to earn a living wage.

You say: But I'm going to college. How many of you know somebody who's graduated with an A.B. in English lit from the best school in the country who's sitting around figuring out what he or she's going to do next, at mother's and father's expense? If you had a skill, you'd be more independent.

And if we have a skill we can contribute to that working force and to the whole economy. Let us give our youngsters an opportunity to serve.

I don't know how many of you have seen monuments to young men who served in the Civilian Conservation Corps during the Depression. They're parks, so many different public monuments, at least in my community and I've seen them in others, that were built by young men who could not get a job during the depression except through this Corps that gave them an opportunity to have some self-sufficiency while contributing to their Nation.

I watched my aunt go off to World War Two as an Army nurse behind Patton's army in North Africa, and another aunt towed targets and ferried bombers for the Women's Army

Service Pilots, and they felt like they were heroines and as a child when I saw them come home from the war I thought they were. Even to this day, the one surviving aunt talks with great pride of what she did and how she served her country.

I watched John Kennedy send our youngsters halfway around the world in the Peace Corps. Our opportunity to serve is on our streets now, not just for young people but for all Americans.

I am hoping that we can galvanize together so that every American says: I can go out and help one other person. I've watched DEA agents, U.S. marshals, and FBI agents go out and tutor in our public schools here in Washington. Just think about what would happen if every American said: I'm going to go out and help somebody.

It doesn't make any difference how old you are. One of the most telling scenes I can remember is a community meeting where an 84-year-old man stood up and said: Guess what I do three mornings a week for three hours each morning; I serve as a teacher's aide for a first grade teacher.

There was a young lady sitting next to him and she stood up and she said: I'm the first grade teacher for whom he volunteers, and the gifted kids can't wait until he gets to them because he expands their horizons beyond

anything I can do, and the kids with learning disabilities can't wait for him because he's so incredibly patient and he's brought their reading level up higher and faster than I could ever do.

It doesn't make any difference how old we are. We can serve this Nation and we are in a time of crisis and it's up to all of us to do it.

But as we serve we can't forget one thing: Being a parent is the single most difficult job I know. It takes love, hard work, intelligence, and an awful lot of luck. It takes time.

I remember my afternoons after school and in the evenings. My mother worked in the home, my father worked downtown. My mother taught us so much of what we know and love, of Beethoven's symphonies, of baseball. She spanked the living daylights out of us and she loved us with all her heart, and there is no child care in the world that will ever be a substitute for what that lady was in our life.

If you had told me in 1960 that I couldn't go to Harvard Law School because I was a woman, I would be furious, and I'd be even angrier now. But somehow or another, I think we can put our children first while at the same time both men and women, both mothers and fathers, can attain their professional goal.

But somehow or another we're going to have to

design our workplaces, design our professional developments, so that we put children first and develop time to spend with them.

It is a time of great excitement, a time of great challenge. But each time people have their backs up against a wall against a challenge, we have watched in American history time after time the people come through. The people, working with their government, can make a difference.

This next decade is going to be a time of great excitement and I look forward to working with all of you in this great adventure.

As I said at the beginning, I think students ask better questions than anybody, including newspaper reporters. So why don't you all fire away with questions.

[Applause.]

QUESTION: What's the number one thing that you want to do, the number one goal that you have in mind that you're going to accomplish in the next four years, that the history books are going to praise you for?

GENERAL RENO: That I will have developed a balanced approach or helped to develop a balanced approach to punishment and prevention that could enable our children to grow as strong, constructive human beings.

[Applause.]

QUESTION: This is in reference to the drug reform programs for the prisoners that you were talking about earlier. What has been done thus far to make them more available and how at such a time in our history can we pay for this, when we trying to reduce the deficit?

GENERAL RENO: In Dade County I watched first offenders --

VOICE: Repeat the question, please?

GENERAL RENO: The question is how do we implement some of the drug reform ideas that I talked about, what has been done to date, and how can we do it with the time where dollars are shrinking?

In Dade County we started a program for non-violent first offenders charged with possession of a small amount of cocaine, where we diverted them conditioned on their getting into a program and going to a drug court where the judge carefully monitored their progress through the treatment program, and when they backslid he sometimes tuned them up, as he put it -- he's kind of a crusty character -- by putting them in the jail for just a little bit of time, to remind them that he meant what he said. He'd then get them back out.

I just saw the preliminary studies of an evaluation done on the drug court and it is working. The people who are successfully completing the program have much

longer times -- no recidivism or much longer times between relapse.

We were in the process as I was leaving of expanding it to second and third-time offenders and to others, and I think it can work. The question is, where is the money going to come from. Look at what we're spending to build prisons now to house people for 10 to 15 years minimum mandatory sentences for non-violent first offenders, some of whom have drug problems.

If we took those dollars and put them up front into a recognition that, even after 10 years, many of these people were coming out and better that they come out earlier in a gradual re-entry into the community, I think we can show by a shift of these dollars that we can make a difference.

I think most people who have analyzed interdiction efforts where we send radar planes and ships into the passages between here and Colombia, that interdiction has not been a cost effective means of dealing with the problem of substance abuse in America. What we have got to do and what I've called for and what I've pledged to work with the drug czar in doing is analyzing what works and what doesn't work and making sure that we approach the problem of substance abuse in America in non-political terms.

This should not be Republican versus Democrat.

It should be a joint effort where the political rhetoric is toned down and where we look at what works and doesn't work in a common sense way.

Let us understand that there are initiatives in the source country that we may undertake in terms of building democracies and reinforcing efforts to build democracies in some of these source countries. Let us see whether interdiction really works or not. Let's look at what reverse stings on streets do. Let's look at what minimum mandatories do and see whether they're working, see whether they're cost effective, and, most of all, see whether we can promise what we preached or whether a minimum mandatory sentence is going to be converted, as it is so often in so many State courts now, into empty promises.

Let us look and see what works. I just came from a marvelous program called A Partnership for a Drug-Free America that is interesting and interested in approaching it in a non-partisan fashion that looks at statistics, at what's working.

I think we can do it if we put our priorities right.

[Applause.]

QUESTION: You spoke of this agenda for helping children in America and that's going to involve, you touched on, education and preventing violence and parenting, a lot

of different areas that the government could help.

I was wondering how we can make this a coordinated effort, instead of one area of the government here and one area of the government here.

GENERAL RENO: I hope to be meeting with Secretary Shalala of HHS, Secretaries Reich, Cisneros, and Riley Monday night. Members of our staffs have been meeting over these last several weeks to try to put together -- we focused initially on youth violence, but, interestingly enough, the sociologists and psychologists who are working on prevention efforts go right back to what I'm talking about.

They say: You can't prevent violence by intervening in a kid's life at 11; you've got to start a lot earlier. So we hope to be able to knit this Federal effort together and make a proposal to the President. We then hope to use the Federal resources to complement as a partnership what local government is doing.

Too often, as I mentioned at the outset, the Federal Government goes in and says: Oh, we've got this title la-di-da, section ABC grant, and you've got to use it the way we say. And the community says: But we don't need it quite that way. You can't have it if you don't do it our way.

And here Washington is, telling a community which

knows its needs far better what it needs. What I hope is that communities can say: These are our needs. We have, somebody might say, a great private not-for-profit corporation that's doing a nice job here and we need some help here, so that we dovetail it together.

There are so many frustrating experiences that we might be able to address. I worked in a housing development where I had the team composed of the police officer, the social worker, and the public health nurse. A lady would come to me and she'd say: Ms. Reno, I just got myself a minimum wage job. I hope to improve myself. But I have just learned that I'm going to lose my benefits by taking this job and I'm going to be worse off than if I hadn't gone to work in the first place.

That's stupid, and what we've got to do --

[Applause.]

-- is see if we can develop programs so that that lady comes in and says: Here's my performance agreement; you help me with this much, reduce my benefits by this much, let me take another step and another step, and then help me get some educational money to get into this job training program, get me some child care, don't let me lose my child care benefits so I can make sure my children are going to be okay, give me half a fighting chance to get started, and I'll prove to you that I can do it.

I think those are the things that we can do if we believe in people and if everybody reaches out and helps.

QUESTION: I'd like to give you something to think about. I don't know if you realize this. The system right now is kind of sending a bad message because prisoners today, they're guaranteed food, they're guaranteed clothing, they're guaranteed shelter, they're even guaranteed recreation.

That's a better deal than homeless people have. That's a better deal than a lot of children who are impoverished have. They don't have those guarantees in life. I understand you have to keep the prisoners confined.

But what can you do to that system, because it's sending a bad message. You know, a lot of innocent people in society don't have the guarantees a lot of the guilty people in society have. Do you have any plans to try and change that?

GENERAL RENO: Yes. That's the reason, one of the reasons, I first became focused on developing a national agenda for children, because I talked to a young man who was 16 about 2 years after I became State Attorney in Dade County. It was about 1980, and he said: Ms. Reno, it's the first time I've ever had a place that I could halfway call my own. It's the first time I've had a clean room. It's the first time I've had clean sheets. It's the first time

I've had three square meals.

And he says: Frankly, I spend enough time in the youth hall and then I'm good, I get bored, I want to go back to my friends on the streets, and I go back to my friends on the streets, and I start missing the room I can halfway call my own and I commit another crime so I can go back.

That made me realize what we were talking about. I even visited him in his home. The last I heard, he was off to a good start, though, because we were trying to work with him.

That's the reason I think it's imperative that we develop a national agenda for children. It will do no good just to put people on more welfare and say, here's more money to fix up your home. We've got to empower American families to take care of their children.

The way you do that is by raising strong and healthy parents. There is no one part of that continuum of life where I think you can make more difference than any other, except perhaps in those first years of zero to three.

But my whole approach is build strong children who can become constructive parents, who will have a skill in which they can participate in the work force, so that they can have a sense that there's a light at the end of the tunnel and that we can make a difference.

It's not going to happen overnight, because it's

taken us 30 years to get into this mess and it's going to take us some time to work it out. But I'm beginning to see hopeful signs. I think we can make a difference.

Yes, you. That's right, with glasses. And then you.

QUESTION: On the floor of the House last Thursday they debated the illegal alien problem. What do you see as the most cost effective way of solving this problem, especially on the border of California, and what role do you see yourself playing?

GENERAL RENO: I think immigration is going to be one of the single greatest problems we face in America in this decade. We are going to be faced as a Nation that has a tremendous tradition of immigrants, a Nation that is a citizen of immigrants, if you will, balanced with the burden that immigration is placing on our public schools, on our public hospitals.

It is an incredible balancing act. I think the first step that we've got to undertake is to upgrade the management and the resources of the Immigration and Naturalization Service. That is within the jurisdiction of the Department of Justice.

When I came in I was amazed that so many of the decisions and the systems were being run with antiquated or nonexistent automation, with kind of old-fashioned

approaches to management. I spent a lot of time in searching for the best possible commissioner to recommend to the President, and he has nominated an experienced and thoughtful person who I think will be able to lead the commission -- the Service.

I think then it becomes imperative, as we restore public confidence in the Immigration and Naturalization Service, that we bring it up to be part of the team. We see it in so many different areas: on the issue of terrorism, in terms of the alien smuggling. There are so many areas where Immigration has got to be a partner with the State Department, with foreign intelligence sources, with law enforcement officials, and we're going to try to do that.

I think it's imperative that we develop programs, to the extent we can, where we pre-clear people coming into the country so that they are cleared before they get on the plane to come in. We've got to develop expedited hearings that are still consistent with due process, and I think we can do that.

We have got to understand that the Mexican border is going to have to be addressed, not only by procedures within our Nation, but what we do to ensure a balance between the United States and Mexico.

There are so many initiatives that are going to have to be undertaken. It is a terribly complex process.

There is going to be great tension caused by public resentment against the impact that aliens have had on communities, and it's going to require all Americans to remember that most of us are the descendants of immigrants and that we have got to provide a balanced approach that is consistent with the Constitution, recognizing that there are too many people who have been born and raised in this Nation that do not begin to have enough to grow as strong, constructive human beings.

Now, yes. No. Yes, you. No.

[Laughter.]

QUESTION: Hi. I think a lot of people complain about the system just being very corrupt and unjust, and I'm wondering, what do you see as a systemic problem with the criminal justice system or the legal system overall, and what can the Federal Government do about changing it?

GENERAL RENO: I think one of the things that can be done about corruption, because I prosecuted my share of corruption cases and I have seen people be corrupt and I never believed that it was possible that that person would be corrupt.

You have got to have constant vigilance. You have got to establish checks and balances. You've got to understand that all of government must be based on a system of checks and balances that can detect corruption.

But I think one of the most important things we can do in terms of public attitude about government is encourage people again to public service. As I was growing up, my mother taught me that the most wonderful calling you could undertake was to serve the public. As I grew up and went to law school, I looked forward to the day that I could serve, that I could participate, and that I could have a voice in trying to reach out and to help others.

After John Kennedy and Bobby Kennedy and Martin Luther King were assassinated, after Watergate, people I think became cynical about government. I didn't hear that many young people interested in government or wanting to participate.

I can tell you, having spent almost 20 years of my life in some form of public service or another now, that I wouldn't trade it for any other calling, except you can't like it too much because you've got to realize that the people can send you home any time they want to. Or the President could tell me: Look, that's it, kid. And nobody must get too attracted to their job.

I had the best experience for that because I ran for the legislature in 1972 in Florida. I campaigned on what I believed in. I talked about the beliefs that I held there.

There was a wonderful man who was running for

Mayor of Dade County that same year. In 1956 he had been the only Florida legislator who had voted to end segregation in our public schools. It was a politically unpopular vote and he knew he was coming home to overwhelming political defeat, but he cast that vote of conscience. He was out of office for about 15 years and then he made a comeback, first as a prosecutor, and then he ran for and was elected Mayor of Dade County.

During that campaign he said: Janet, just keep on doing and saying what you believe to be right. Don't pussyfoot, don't equivocate, don't talk out of both sides of your mouth, and you'll wake up the next morning feeling good about yourself.. But if you pussyfoot and equivocate and try to be Miss Popularity, you'll wake up the next morning feeling miserable.

Well, I woke up the morning after my election not feeling entirely good, because I had lost my election.

[Laughter.]

But I remembered what John Orr, the candidate, had taught me and it's held me in good stead ever since. In Dade County when I had to make a hard decision as to how to charge somebody, I'd collect all the information I possibly could, I made the best judgment I possibly could, and I charged. And when I woke up the next morning and some people were saying, you didn't charge mean enough, and

others said, you shouldn't have charged at all, I just said: Well, I tried to do my best.

On the day of April the 19th, after Waco, I knew what I had tried to do and, although it was a terrible tragedy that wrenched my heart, I knew that I had tried the best I could with the information that I had. What you're committed to in situations like that is to try to do better.

Also the great lesson that I learned from my defeat in the election was that somebody put a biography of Abraham Lincoln on my bedside table and it was very helpful to learn that he had lost his first election. It helps to know how to lose. You know it's not the end of the world.

[Applause.]

QUESTION: You talked about the drug problem and trying and seeing what works. I'm wondering if it isn't time to try dealing with the drug problem as a public health issue, rather than as a law enforcement issue, because it seems like this prohibition in a way helps breed this atmosphere of violence. What are your feelings about that idea?

GENERAL RENO: I think you can make it --

VOICE: Would you repeat the question, please?

GENERAL RENO: The question is that the criminal justice system and the way it's treating the drug issue now seems to perpetuate violence; isn't there a better way to

do it?

QUESTION: Yes, to treat it as a public health issue.

GENERAL RENO: Treat it as a public health issue.

I made it a point to get people into treatment. I have been invited to three different addiction treatment programs to participate in the graduation. It is one of the most moving experiences that I know, and what is so heartbreaking in so many of the instances is that people say: I got here because I got arrested and I would never have gotten into treatment if I hadn't gotten arrested.

I think you can have a marvelous link between the leverage of the criminal justice system and the monitoring that a judge can provide, while at the same time treating it as a public health issue and providing the treatment.

I think we've got to be very careful in our public health approach because there's been a tendency to think of it as a high-flown medical problem that requires five weeks hospitalization in a fancy hospital. I don't think you need all that. I think you can get the person detoxed and stabilized and then, with a careful balance, using that carrot and stick approach, using the criminal justice system and the public health approach, you can make a tremendous difference.

Too many recovering addicts have told me that they

were helped by the fear of arrest or by the ultimate arrest. I think it can be a very effective tool. I think if you approach it the right way you can make a difference.

Now, one point I am emphatic about, and I think you make a very -- I think taking what you say, you make an extraordinarily important point. When I left Dade County there were waiting lists of up to 60 people for any one treatment bed for a person who did not have insurance and could not afford treatment on their own.

I think something is wrong with a Nation that does not provide treatment to people who are begging for help for a substance abuse problem. If you had a drunk have five stiff drinks at a bar, go roaring down Constitution Avenue tonight at 60 miles an hour and plow into five people and kill those five people and break his two arms, his two arms would be set tonight even if he couldn't afford a doctor at the D.C. public hospital over here.

Surely, surely we ought to be able to provide treatment for those people who are on waiting lists, and I'm told that in too many communities in this Nation there are waiting lists.

I think what we need is creative approaches, however, so that we have a case manager who can work with these people, who knows the con when he sees it and can help them and leverage them. You need the after-care, you need

the 24-hour hotline when a person thinks he's about to go through the dark hole again. You need support every step of the way.

You've got to remember that for many they will always be a recovering addict rather than a recovered addict, who needs that support whenever they can get it or need it.

QUESTION: [Inaudible] restructure the work place, and I wanted to ask if you have any concrete ideas about how to restructure the work place about roles and the family.

GENERAL RENO: The question is how can we restructure the work place to really focus on families. I'm carefully reviewing Department of Justice initiatives now that I'm impressed with that, interestingly enough, have been announced but not circulated so that employees know it. It's a fascinating problem of communications.

But I can speak with more certainty about what can be done in a local work place such as my office was in Miami. One of the things that I did was to try to provide maternity and paternity leave whenever the parent or parents wanted it and for the length of time they wanted it, and I tried to bring them back without interrupting their career path, and I encouraged them to stay gone for as long as they wanted and would try to bring them back. I worked with them in every way to ensure that they would have time with those

children during that terribly formative period, remembering those children in the neonatal unit.

The second thing that I did, listened to principals who told me that one of the greatest problems they had was in getting parents to come to school. I remembered my school days when my mother was a homeroom mother and she participated in the PTA and went to school programs and school plays. And the principal said that wasn't happening because, if the parents cared, they were too often working to really be involved and participate.

So I developed the concept, which I sold to other Florida prosecutors, of school leave, not for the parent but so that the parent could go participate in the child's school programs. This leave was in addition to annual and sick leave. And for the kids in the office who didn't have children, I said, you can go volunteer at the school during the same time. And they liked that idea, so it worked out well.

One of the things that I think we can do, we developed flex-time and shared office hours, where one person worked in the morning, one in the afternoon. I'm exploring telecommuting because I think we're all going to be linked by computers, so you can do briefs at home, you can pull up the case law on your computer. I think telecommuting is a thing of the future.

One of the things that people think I'm joking about, and I'm trying to be provocative, is to suggest an 8:00 to 3:00 workday, so that both parents can leave work to pick up their children and spend quality time with their children.

People say: Well, what about my profits? We can accomplish far more in 8:00 to 3:00 today than we could accomplish in 8:00 to 5:00 on July the 7th, 1891, when we didn't have computers and we had gaslights.

I don't know how many of you have been around an office at about 3:30 in the afternoon. The phones start to ring: May I speak to my mommy; I can't get in. I think if you talk to every working parent that really cared about their children, they would accomplish in almost 8:00 to 3:00 everything they could accomplish in 8:00 to 5:00 by cutting out coffee breaks and the gift of gab.

I did have some women the other day that said that wasn't going to be fair because all the fathers would go play golf.

[Laughter.]

And I said no, no, no; I have some criticism of some of the ladies who would go to their aerobics class.

But I think it would give people far more time to place a priority where it needs to be placed.

QUESTION: You had mentioned about domestic

violence and this kind of stems off of that. Currently there's obviously a large amount of rape going on in our society that comes from the home. Whereas some criminals who burglarize get a large sentence and it's relatively easy to prosecute them, you get rapists who are not prosecuted because it's so difficult, and once they are prosecuted they get very low terms.

I was wondering if you have any views on that?

GENERAL RENO: We developed a sex battery unit in the office to try to identify prosecutors who were really skilled in the prosecution of these cases and who were most adept at handling the cases.

One of the things that startled me, because I served on the advisory board of the rape treatment center, is in the last three years before I left Miami over 50 percent of the cases seen at the rape treatment center were children, which says something else about society.

They are difficult cases to prosecute, sometimes because they are one on one and you have to prove the case beyond and to the exclusion of a reasonable doubt. Frankly, I would not like to change that burden of proof because I think that that has got to be part of the criminal process. I think you've got to presume somebody innocent until we prove them guilty.

But it has not been my experience that the judges

have been that lenient on anybody convicted of rape. And I think it again takes a persuasive and vigorous advocate who can let the judge know just what's involved.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, Bobby Kennedy, he ran on a platform when he was running for President and when he was Attorney General that focused a lot on racism in the sixties. I'm a sociology major and I'm interested in learning what the public thinks and also about what policymakers think about whether or not the problems of racism, separatism, things such as that, have gotten better or worse since the sixties?

We've got the laws now that are supposed to protect against discrimination based on race, ethnicity. But there's still separations in schools and housing and even in the work place. The work place is the one place where they say that things have gotten better.

Would you propose to -- as far as I know, there is no national task force on racism, on eliminating racism or on combatting racism, and I don't know what department or what cabinet positions that that should be aimed at.

GENERAL RENO: I think that there is a perception of racism in some instances that is more a result of socioeconomic conditions and I think that there is clear racism in other situations, and I think that there is perhaps unintended racism that is a product of different

problems.

Let me give you an example. The Florida legislature did a study of the application of the career criminal statute in Florida because many people believed that prosecutors were using it in a disparate way that unfairly prejudiced black offenders. They did a very careful statistical study which I think was very sound, and they found that of the 20 State Attorneys in Florida only 2 did not discriminate in any way in the application of the statute.

Fortunately, one was my office. But we had put a lot of time and effort into it to make sure that we did not discriminate. But what that showed was I was prosecuting proportionately more black offenders as career criminals than white offenders, but for every offender similarly situated with the same prior record they were getting the same treatment, regardless of whether they were black or white.

So yes, there was discrimination in the system. Then I was prosecuting more black offenders, but if I started tracing their prior history, there was a failure of institutions every step of the way. That is one of the reasons that I have been advocating for a national children's agenda to focus on it.

I'm committed in the Department of Justice to

doing everything I can to vigorously enforce the civil rights laws of this Nation. But more and more I see something that Martin Luther King said. He said: What good is being able to eat at the lunch counter if you can't afford the hamburger? What good is it to be free to go to the college that you want to if you're going to get killed in street violence at 13? What good is it to have the right to prosecute to avoid discrimination in housing if you end up homeless on the streets because you got into drug problems because there was not a support mechanism around you?

So I think that it is imperative that we not only focus on vigorous enforcement of the civil rights of this Nation, but it is important to focus on children and family to give children the opportunity to grow as strong, constructive human beings.

QUESTION: Do you think that race relations have improved since the sixties?

GENERAL RENO: I think in many instances they have in one category, that I think people have far greater opportunity to go to law school, to get education. They have far greater remedies.

I think what has become far worse since the sixties is the condition of our children. In the early seventies -- and I don't have the figure for the sixties.

In the early seventies, 13 percent of our children lived in poverty, whereas about 20 percent of the elderly. Now about 13 percent of the elderly live in poverty and 21 percent of the children, a far greater percentage than any other age group.

The percentage of black children living in poverty is far greater than any other. That is as a result of a socioeconomic problem, because I think what you saw was with the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964 you saw many black families take advantage of the remedies provided for that Act and they gained equal opportunity. That left the inner cities with socioeconomic problems that have been compounded since Bobby Kennedy's time.

So I think it takes a thoughtful approach that focuses on civil rights enforcement, but also understands that we have got to address the long-range issues. The thing that I see that is so compelling to me is again and again around the country I see so many young people reaching out to form partnerships amongst classmates, to form partnerships in the community that can make a difference. I think we can do a lot if each of us gets involved.

QUESTION: To build on the question of racism, following the recent march on Washington, what's your stance on the expansion and protection of the civil rights of gays and lesbians, especially those in the military?

GENERAL RENO: I can't speak to the military issues because that got started before I got involved in it, and we are now on the Meinhold brief and we are trying to address those issues with Drew Days, the Solicitor General. But I don't think anybody should be discriminated against based on who they are.

[Applause.]

We'll take you and then you.

QUESTION: You mentioned that a lot of your -- one of the problems of kids is that they don't have two parents or they don't have a strong support system to give them values. Dan Quayle during the election mentioned something about family values.

Do you believe that what he said had some merit?

GENERAL RENO: Yes. I mean, I think I don't know of anybody that would disagree with the fact that the family, a strong family -- and a single parent can be an incredibly strong family --

[Applause.]

-- that a strong family is the best care-giver a child can have, that family values are extraordinarily important.

I will tell you that, of all the things that I've done in my life, what I have done with my family has been almost -- frankly, more important. The fact that I was able

to take care of my mother and make sure that she was comfortable and happy and could explore the world -- every time I come down the Mall here, as I came around the corner -- she had cancer and I knew she didn't have long to live, and she'd gotten so she couldn't get around. So my sister and I piled a wheelchair into a motor home and off we went up the Blue Ridge Parkway.

She couldn't see very well by that time, and so I said: Well, we'll go see the dinosaurs; those will be big enough for you to see. Well, she loved the dinosaurs. Then she'd always loved El Greco, so we roared her through the National Gallery because she could see the big El Grecos. Then we roared her down around the Capitol in the wheelchair.

She had a wonderful visit and got home and a week later went through Hurricane Andrew and was a model to me of how not to be upset in the middle of Hurricane Andrew. And the fact that I cared for her and made sure she was okay is as important to me as anything I've ever done professionally.

The fact that I helped two children whose parents died get off to I hope a good start has been as important to me.

A commitment to family should I think be and personally to me has been as rewarding as anything that I've

ever done. So in that sense I don't know of anybody who wouldn't say that families, strong families, commitment to families, however you want to phrase it, whether it be in terms of values or otherwise, is important.

The issue is how do you build that. You can't say, go have values. The best way I've developed it is to look at the continuum and understand that you can't figure out which comes first, the chicken or the egg. You've got to start it at every point along the line.

A 14-year-old is going to be able to far better resist the temptation to get pregnant at 14 if she has had a strong development as she goes along. A 13-year-old boy is going to resist the temptation to follow his peers off to hold somebody up at a corner if he's had a strong development along the way, and they are going to be far better parents.

There's no easy answer. There's no magic solution. And if there's anything America has learned in this decade already, I think during the seventies and clearly during the eighties it was: Oh, let's do it this way; we want answers, we want answers right now, right now; we want a solution.

I think all of us know it's going to take longer, it's going to take some careful work, but we can do it.

QUESTION: In relation to the fact that a large

percentage of murders and other felonies are indeed drug-related, how do you justify your assertion that drug offenders are non-violent and that it can be a solution to take care of them outside of the prison situation?

GENERAL RENO: I justify my assertion that they are non-violent because they have not taken a gun and put it up beside somebody's head. I use as examples the person who goes into a drug market, buys some cocaine because his world is falling apart because he's not had structure or because he just wants to experiment. He hasn't hurt anybody. He hasn't sold anybody the stuff.

I think he deserves to be treated from a public policy point of view with the alternatives of the carrot and stick that we approached in terms of the drug court.

QUESTION: What percentage of murders in the D.C. area are drug-related, do you feel?

GENERAL RENO: I don't know. But what I would suggest to you is, if you look at it from the point of view of what we can afford, the person who takes a gun and puts it up beside somebody's head and threatens to blow their head off I would characterize as a violent offender.

What I have discovered is that there are people who did not take a gun, who did not hurt anybody at that point, are getting 10 and 15 year sentences that they are serving because they are minimum mandatories, whereas the

person who took the gun and put it up beside somebody's head is getting out in 20 to 30 percent of a 5-year sentence because we don't have enough prison cells to house people for the length of time the judges are sentencing them.

What any criminologist will say is what you desperately, desperately need is truth in sentencing. You need to identify the truly dangerous offenders, the recidivists, the three-time armed robber, the major trafficker, the major distributor, the person that's the kingpin, and you've got to incapacitate them for the rest of their crime-producing life, which is about 55 or 60.

To do that you need enough prison cells to house them for the length of that time. You've then got to understand that others are coming out sooner rather than later.

If we persist in the minimum mandatory sentences in the Federal Government, you're going to see what exists in Florida. Florida adopted sentencing guidelines 5 years before the Federal Government did. It's had minimum mandatories since the seventies on every subject that you can think about.

When I left Florida, the Governor of Florida had just called a conference on gridlock because very violent offenders were being released in 20 to 30 percent of the sentence because the prisons had reached their capacity,

because there were people who were serving minimum mandatory sentences on the non-violent offenses, non-violent compared to the armed robber, non-violent compared to the person who shot somebody. And you saw truly dangerous offenders who were recidivists getting out.

I don't think that's good public policy. I think, whatever we try to do in terms of treatment, we've got to make sure that we carry it out in a way that makes sense.

QUESTION: What are your feelings on the death penalty?

GENERAL RENO: I am personally opposed to the death penalty.

[Applause.]

I made it a practice when I was hiring, I interviewed all the people I finally hired as prosecutors in Dade County. And I would always ask them: What's your position on the death penalty?

And you could see them say, oh, I'm for it, thinking that that's what a prosecutor wanted to hear. And I'd say: Oh, why? I would say in a good 75 percent of the cases I got the most rambling, convoluted answers you've ever heard. And here were people saying, I'm for the death penalty, but they couldn't say why.

Other people would tell me: Well, I'm for it because it's a deterrent; it prevents other people from

doing it. And I'd say: Do you have any studies that show that? Well, no. Well, why do you say it's a deterrent? Well, I don't know.

I have researched the issue and I haven't found any study that indicates that the death penalty has been a deterrent.

Thirdly, I think that all of law, at least in a civilized society, should be to promote human life and therefore to take it for having taken it I think is somewhat inconsistent.

I think that all of punishment is arbitrary. When a father spanks two brothers, one complains that he spanked him harder than the other one, the father can make up for that in the months to come with love and affection and the like. You can solve the inequities of sentences through probation, pardon, mitigation, parole, clemency. But once that death penalty is carried out, you can't.

You can get Judge A who is a stiff sentencer and Judge B who is not so stiff. Two people can commit similar crimes, one can go to the electric chair and one doesn't.

I think that the only justification for the death penalty is vengeance. While my mother lived, if I had walked onto my front porch and found that somebody was still there and they had murdered her, I would tear that person apart from limb to limb with all the vigor that I could

muster, and that would be vengeance as a personal sentiment that I think people could have some understanding of.

But I don't think that a civilized government can engage in vengeance. I think it's something that we have to carefully think through. I think it is imperative that we develop laws that make sure that when we ask for the death penalty, which I did regularly in Florida -- I could ask for it, and there are other things in government that I disagree with that I adhere to -- but that we make sure that when we ask for it we've got the right person, that we impose it fairly, that there is no discrimination based on race, that the procedures and the provision for counsel are appropriate, so that the punishment can be fair and can be creditable.

I will point out to you one of the most important things that ever happened to me. It's about three or four years ago, when the Governor of Florida asked me to go to another part of the State to investigate a case that we had not handled.

It was the case of a man who had been prosecuted, convicted, and sentenced to death 21 years before for the poisoning death of his seven children in Arcadia, Florida. He had always maintained his innocence. The Supreme Court set aside the death penalty statute in most States and Florida's was set aside. Otherwise, he would have gone to

the electric chair because his appeals were exhausted.

We re-investigated the case and reached the conclusion that the evidence had been insufficient to charge him originally, it was clearly insufficient at the time, that because of the death and the incapacity of witnesses and the passage of time and the destruction of evidence we could not say exactly what happened, but that he was probably innocent and that he should go free.

For as long as I live, I will remember looking at that man, who was as close to me as you are right there for the entire day in that old southern courtroom, looking at a man who had been in prison for the last 21 years for a crime I did not believe he had committed. Then as I left the courthouse and turned and looked over my shoulder and watched him walk out of the courthouse a free man for the first time in 21 years, I understood more clearly than ever before how, no matter what we do as prosecutors, we've got to remember that one of our first objectives has got to be to make sure that innocent people don't get prosecuted. And the second, equally important, objective has got to be to make sure that we convict people based on principles of due process and fair play.

[Applause.]

QUESTION: When a single parent is incarcerated, her children are usually put into the foster system or into

an institution, and they generally many times end up becoming felons themselves and become incarcerated as adults. Do you have any ideas on stopping this cycle?

GENERAL RENO: One of the things that we are looking at is some excellent programs that I've heard about around the country since I came to Washington that provide for kind of a family setting in which the sentence can be served.

I think, however, that so much can be done to prevent foster care for children, whether it be getting to that mother early before she commits a really serious offense that results in her being imprisoned and in other situations.

A case I remember, I don't remember all the details, but it went something like this: Single parent, she had a job, but she had three children, husband had left her, pretty much cleaned her out of any funds, and she was struggling to make ends meet.

One of the children had run a fever rather regularly. She had taken him initially to the doctor. The doctor had given him some medicine, but she didn't have a car. They'd repossessed her car. The doctor was two bus transfers across town or something like that. So she was slow in getting him back to the doctor.

She spent more time at home. She was about to

lose her job. She was becoming desperate as to how she was going to pay the rent. She was staying up and taking care of the child, who was crying incessantly at night. And one night she just backhanded him; the child fell and was cut and hurt rather badly, fortunately not permanently, but badly.

The children were put in foster homes. She just went downhill immediately, ended up in the back seat of a car as a homeless person. The children ended up in three or four different foster homes.

That mother, and I later talked to her, was a good woman. If she'd been given half a support service up front, half a number where she knew exactly who to call, or a full-service school system where she could have dropped in during the day, she could have gotten help and all of that could have been prevented.

America has too often waited until the crisis happens before it dumps money into it when, with an expenditure of far less dollars up front, it could have had a far more satisfactory solution.

Thank you all very much.

[Applause and, at 8:02 p.m., end of remarks.]