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Address By
U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno
to the
National Law Enforcement Council

Monday, October 18, 1993

(Transcribed from a provided tape.)

1 VOICE: -- October the 18th, 1993. We are at the
2 Metropolitan Club. Our guest today is the Hon. Janet Reno,
3 Attorney General of the United States.

4 Following will be an introduction of the Attorney
5 General by council chairman Ordway P. Burdan. Mr. Burdan's
6 remarks will be followed by a brief talk by the Attorney
7 General, and then the usual question-and-answer period. The
8 following is Ordway Burdan's introduction of the Attorney
9 General of the United States.

10 (Tape is edited.)

11 (Pause.)

12 MR. BURDAN: Introduction for Attorney General
13 Janet Reno:

14 We are highly honored today to have as our guest
15 the Attorney General of the United States.

16 She was born and raised in Miami, and attended
17 public school in Dade County. Our guest received her
18 undergraduate degree from Cornell University and her law
19 degree from Harvard Law School.

20 Prior to being named by President Clinton to
21 become Attorney General, she served for the past 15 years
22 as State attorney for Dade County, Florida. Before becoming
23 Dade County prosecutor, our guest practiced law with the
24 firm of Steele, Hector & Davis in Miami. She also served
25 as assistant State attorney and a staff director of the

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1 Florida State legislature's judiciary committee.

2 She is a past president of the Florida Prosecuting
3 Attorneys Association, was a member of the Special Committee
4 on Criminal Justice in a Free Society of the American Bar
5 Association, and was a member of the ABA's task force on
6 minorities and the justice system.

7 Please join me in giving a warm welcome to the
8 Attorney General of the United States, Janet Reno.

9 (Applause.)

10 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Thank you very much.

11 And I think it is probably appropriate -- there
12 are a number of people here who I met first on a cold
13 February day in the Old Executive Office Building right down
14 the street, and I just want you to know how much I
15 appreciate your encouragement over these months, as I have
16 gotten started, and your initial support. And I look
17 forward to continuing to work with you in every way
18 possible.

19 People ask me as I was nominated, what do you know
20 about being Attorney General? What do you know about
21 Federal law? And I did not want to be presumptuous as to
22 suggest that an experience of 15 years as a prosecutor in
23 Dade County might stand me in good stead, but I can tell you
24 now that it does. And it prepares you for a lot of what you
25 are going to see.

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1 I think it is important to look back and to learn
2 from communities and from people who are doing the crime
3 fighting on the front end, at the front of the line, on the
4 streets, where the going is so terribly difficult.

5 I have prosecuted cases. I have seen us ask for
6 the death penalty. We have secured the death penalty. I
7 have seen it carried out. I have seen our career criminal
8 program do remarkable things, in terms of getting enhanced
9 sentences. I have cooperated with the United States
10 Attorney in the Southern District of Florida in what I hope
11 will be a model of cooperation between State and Federal
12 prosecutors. I have talked with victims, served on victims
13 groups and have watched the whole process unfold.

14 One of the things that is puzzling to me right now
15 is to watch the media reaction, as if the media has suddenly
16 discovered that America is sick and fed up with violence.
17 I do not know where they were a year ago or two years ago
18 or three years ago, or over the last 15 years, but the
19 American people are outraged at violence. They have been.
20 In many of our jurisdictions, violence is down, but they are
21 still outraged and they still consider it unacceptable.

22 But I think, for too long now, they have been
23 troubled by promises that were never carried out, and by
24 political rhetoric that really did not mean what it said,
25 and that they are very leery of promises about what we

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1 intend to do about crime, because they never really see that
2 it is carried out. They see, too often, sentences that do
3 not mean what they say, threats that do not mean what they
4 say.

5 And I think it is extraordinarily important for
6 all of us at every level of government and every part of the
7 criminal justice system to work together to develop a truly
8 comprehensive, properly funded program that addresses crime;
9 that we look at what works and does not work; that we
10 approach it from a nonpartisan point of view. Neither
11 Democrats nor Republicans like crime or violence. We all
12 want to end it. And we have the best chance of ending it
13 if we put aside political rhetoric and get to the heart of
14 it, and try to figure out a program that makes sense.

15 I approach it from a very common sense point of
16 view. If you have got punishment, you have got to mean what
17 you say. The threat of punishment not carried out is one
18 of the worst things imaginable, in terms of giving
19 confidence and credibility to the criminal justice system.
20 But, at the same time, just as we must engage in punishment
21 and make sure that it is carried out, I think it is
22 imperative that we do everything we can to prevent crime.

23 And we have enough case histories now, where we
24 can see intervention points along the way where we could
25 have prevented crime. There is not a crime victim I know

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1 that would have preferred not to have the crime prevented.
2 And I think, working together, we can do so much, both in
3 punishment and prevention.

4 I think, first in our efforts, we have got to make
5 sure that we have truth in sentencing for the dangerous
6 offenders, the violent offenders, the career criminals, the
7 major traffickers, the major distributors. Nothing, nothing
8 so frustrates a prosecutor like me, a citizen, a victim than
9 to see somebody sentenced after a trial, no plea bargain,
10 nothing, sentenced to 15 years in State prison, and then,
11 turn around in three years, and find them out in 20 to 30
12 percent of the sentence.

13 And that was what was happening in Florida. The
14 average sentence being served was only 20 to 30 percent of
15 the sentence because of prison overcrowding. Because people
16 had promised minimum mandatories, but never put the jail
17 cells with the minimum mandatories. They had promised that
18 there would be punishment through the sentencing guidelines,
19 but they never matched their promises.

20 I wondered whether that was just a Florida
21 phenomenon. I came to Washington. This recent spate of
22 violence in Washington is allegedly attributed to the same
23 thing -- people getting out early. I travel across the
24 country and I hear from sheriffs and State correctional
25 officers the problem is the same.

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1 I thought, well, I will have authority over the
2 Bureau of Prisons that will not have such overcrowding
3 issues. But at the rate we are sending people to prison
4 now, we are not going to have enough prison cells, and, if
5 we have the prison cells, through conversion of military
6 bases and the like, we will not have the operating expenses
7 to manage those prison cells.

8 It is an extraordinarily frustrating phenomenon.
9 And what I think we have got to do, regardless of the money,
10 is make sure that we have enough prison cells in State and
11 Federal systems to house people for the length of time the
12 judges are sentencing them when they are dangerous offenders
13 and major traffickers and major distributors.

14 How do we do that?

15 We are adding 36 prisons, with a total of about
16 40,000 new beds over the next several years -- an increase
17 of about 50 percent. But there is much that we can do, in
18 terms of State and Federal use of prisons. It is very
19 frustrating to me to see a nonviolent first offender, who
20 did not possess a weapon and was a low-level participant in
21 a drug deal, in prison for a minimum mandatory sentence of
22 10 years, when armed robbers are getting out of the State
23 system in 20 to 30 percent of the sentence.

24 I would like to join forces to make sure that for
25 the dangerous people we keep them off the streets for the

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1 rest of their crime-producing life if we can do it, or at
2 least for the length of their sentences.

3 How can we help to achieve some of these efforts?

4 One of the things that troubles me is that I find
5 that 26 percent of the people in Federal prisons today are
6 illegal aliens or aliens. I am told, in New York,
7 California, certainly, it was the case in Florida, a
8 substantial portion of the prisoners in those States in the
9 State prison system are likewise aliens. It has always been
10 my posture that we should try to devise a way that the
11 Federal Government assume responsibility for those who
12 commit crimes who are here illegally. And we are trying to
13 work on that to see what can be done.

14 Many of these people are nonviolent offenders, who
15 could be returned to their country at a lot less cost to the
16 American people, if we could do it the right way. And we
17 had conversations with the President of Mexico last week to
18 try to devise such a system for the nonviolent people that
19 could be returned.

20 One of the most wonderful tools that I had as a
21 local prosecutor was the use of trigger law. Because we
22 were not getting sufficient time in State prison for armed
23 career criminals, we had a marvelous working relationship
24 with our local sheriff and the Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms
25 Bureau, where we worked together from the beginning of a

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1 case -- we were willing to cross-designate prosecutors if
2 the U.S. Attorney's Office needed them. But we had such a
3 smooth working system, between the local police, the Federal
4 prosecutor's office, ATF, and ours, that we were prepared
5 and ready to go, and we were getting 15 years minimum
6 mandatory as we took them to Federal court. And I do not
7 expect those people to be out for a long time.

8 I think we can do the same thing with respect to
9 gang violence and other types of crimes that cut across
10 State lines and Federal jurisdictions. I am amazed, as I
11 travel through the country -- I went out to the National
12 Sheriffs Association meeting in Salt Lake City -- and
13 talking with the local officials there, they begin to feel
14 the impact of gang influence sweeping up from Los Angeles.
15 It then sweeps across through Denver. Or you go to Kansas
16 City, and there may be a drug gang coming up from the
17 Southeast.

18 If we exchanged information and coordinated our
19 efforts, I think we could do ever so much more, in terms of
20 focusing on these offenders, where the appropriate Federal
21 jurisdiction existed, making sure that these people were
22 prosecuted, while the State courts focused on those that
23 were purely local problems.

24 We must focus and continue to focus on the
25 high-level drug trafficker. People keep asking me to spell

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1 out what our drug policy is. Our drug policy is to go after
2 the major organizations, to try to put the organizations out
3 of business, to try to look at the whole picture,
4 recognizing that to put one person behind bars, only to have
5 that vacuum filled by another, is not going to do the trick.

6 We have got to do far more in terms of local
7 street efforts, in supporting local law enforcement wherever
8 possible. And we must do far more in terms of prevention.

9 But one of the best ways to put those traffickers
10 out of business is to really focus on the highest-level
11 people in the organization, and try to get the maximum time,
12 making sure that we have adequate prison cells to house
13 them, and that, where possible, we use Federal prison space,
14 where there is appropriate Federal jurisdiction.

15 One of the major efforts that I have seen that
16 struck me as so rewarding and which gave me such a hopeful
17 sign as an example of how people can prosecute together,
18 work together, ignore turf issues, and really come together
19 as an effective effort is the violent trafficking project
20 that has been underway in Philadelphia for some time. I met
21 with the representatives of that project this past Thursday.
22 I was so impressed.

23 Here was the local prosecutor and the U.S.
24 Attorney, the commissioner of police, the SAC from ATF, FBI,
25 DEA -- it was one of the troopers, it was one of the most

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1 effective organizations I have seen. And I thought, well,
2 maybe they are doing it just for show, so I sat in the
3 meeting for a long time. There was a give and take. I
4 asked them how come they got along so well. And they said,
5 well, we do not have any egos.

6 Well, when Lynn Abraham tells you she does not
7 have an ego, you kind of step back a little bit and wonder.
8 But what you realize is that there were people of great good
9 sense who were committed to doing it the right way and to
10 using their resources. And what they had been able to do,
11 in terms of focusing on the violent traffickers and putting
12 those people out of business, was again a classic example.
13 What they were getting in terms of prison time in Federal
14 prison was again an example of how we can assist local
15 government in taking these major traffickers, particularly
16 the violent traffickers, out of the system and keeping them
17 out.

18 But I think we have got to realize that there are
19 other resources we have to focus on as well. I think the
20 major crime problem in America today is youth violence. You
21 get a 13- or 14-year-old -- and we have got to send a
22 message to that 13- or 14-year-old that there is no excuse
23 for putting a gun up beside somebody's head and hurting
24 them. They have got to be punished. And police officer
25 after police officer in Miami used to ring his hands with

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1 me and say, Janet, what are we going to do? The judges just
2 keep turning them out so that the kids say, hey, man,
3 nothing is going to happen to me; nothing ever happens to
4 anybody in the juvenile justice system.

5 We were trying to turn that around and convince
6 the judges, and we had some real success. We had some
7 success because police officers worked with community
8 leaders who went to the judge and said, this kid deserves
9 to be punished, and you cannot continue to let him out.

10 But we need appropriate facilities for these kids.
11 And we need to get the boot camps spelled out in the crime
12 bill funded so that we can have some alternatives for these
13 kids so that they know they are going to be punished, and
14 they will not argue that their past life, their broken home,
15 their poverty is an excuse for doing what they have done.
16 They have got to know there is a punishment.

17 At the same time, we have got to understand that
18 they are coming back into the community and that, through
19 the boot camp process, we can give them a fair chance of
20 succeeding if we only work together with the community in
21 the right way. But so many of our people are coming back
22 -- not just the youth -- they are coming back sooner, rather
23 than later. And I have had police officer after police
24 officer say, Janet, it is fine for me to arrest him. It is
25 fine for you to prosecute them. And we try to do something

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1 about them. But we have got to get them back into the
2 community with a chance of succeeding.

3 And he says, I know the guy. He has been a crack
4 addict. I get him arrested, you get him into a treatment
5 program. And unless you provide followup and supervision
6 along the way, all my effort is going to be for naught.
7 That is how we devised the drug court in Dade County, that
8 provided a program for first-time offenders charged with
9 possession of a small amount of cocaine.

10 And we tried to provide a year's worth of
11 supervision and treatment by the court that included the
12 threat of prosecution and punishment. When the guy came
13 back with a positive drug test, he knew that he was going
14 to be facing that judge and he was going to be facing some
15 sanction.

16 I have always been a little bit leery about
17 touting the programs that I have been involved in, because
18 I wanted somebody who was objective to come down and check
19 it out. And I think that program has been checked out
20 enough now to be touted as successful and as an example of
21 what we can do.

22 It makes no sense to prosecute somebody, know that
23 they have a drug problem, put them in prison, put them in
24 a program, and then dump them back into the community
25 without having treated them or having a followup and a

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1 chance to leverage them into a successful program.

2 All of this becomes important because we have got
3 to do everything we can to make sure that these resources
4 are provided.

5 Next, I came to Washington expecting that I would
6 come into that conference room in the Attorney General's
7 office and that there would be regular meetings of law
8 enforcement, that there would be regular information and
9 current information on crime trends in the United States,
10 on drug trends, patterns of drug usage, gang activity,
11 organized crime activity, and that I would have what you
12 might call a monthly report that was current, that was not
13 based on an analysis of data that was a year or two old, but
14 that was current, so that we could plan a national crime
15 strategy.

16 I also assumed that people would then gather
17 around the table and we would discuss what a national crime
18 strategy should be, so that we would tailor it then from
19 region to region, but that there would be an overall
20 strategy that drove the U.S. Attorneys' efforts, the DEA,
21 the FBI, and that we would share it with agencies outside
22 the Department of Justice.

23 That was not the case.

24 It has been very difficult to pull from all the
25 pieces, from UCR, from BJS, from DEA, from local drug

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1 forecasting units, all this information together so that you
2 can understand what is happening. And it is interesting,
3 when you go into a community, you ask the local sheriff or
4 the local police chief, what is your crime situation? And
5 you get such confused information.

6 In one jurisdiction, I asked what percentage of
7 illegal aliens were in State prison. I was told 20 percent
8 and I nearly died, because it was the central United States
9 and I knew we had a problem, but I did not dream the problem
10 was of that magnitude. Two hours later they came back
11 sheepishly, telling me it was probably less than 2 percent.

12 But it is that type of lack of information, it is
13 that situation with respect to lack of information that I
14 think presents a critical problem.

15 So, as soon as Director Freeh came on board, we
16 pulled everybody together, and we will be meeting this week
17 to see the first report on what they have been able to
18 develop in terms of a solid base of information that we can
19 begin to share with local law enforcement around the
20 country.

21 It would be my hope that, working together amongst
22 the Federal agencies, with local participation, we can
23 define a strategy that will help all the agencies involved
24 direct their efforts, recognizing that we must then tailor
25 it locally. And it would be our hope that the U.S.

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1 Attorney, working with DEA, the FBI and the other Federal
2 law enforcement agencies, would adapt national strategies
3 to local problems and local situations, so that everybody
4 knew that they were on the same page.

5 I think we can do so much. I am so encouraged by
6 the experience that I had in Philadelphia with the violent
7 trafficking project and with the willingness of people to
8 work together. But not only must we have a coordinated
9 Federal effort, as I have told so many of you, the time has
10 come for us to develop a real partnership between the
11 Federal and local government.

12 Nothing frustrates me as much, nothing, as to have
13 people continue to talk to me about the one-way street that
14 too often exists between Federal law enforcement and the
15 State and local law enforcement agencies. Police agency
16 after police agency has said, Janet, I give them all the
17 information, and I expect at least a little bit coming back.

18 I think we can exchange information on a far more
19 comprehensive level than we have before. I think we have
20 developed some lines of trust and communication that can
21 ensure that. But we have a long way to go. Because for too
22 long there has been a mentality that it is a one-way street.

23 I think we can change that, and we can develop a
24 real partnership that supports local law enforcement. And,
25 most of all, I want to get out of claiming credit for

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1 things. I have local law enforcement tell me, Janet, they
2 just want to take that case so they can get credit for it.
3 We are not interested in credit any more in the Department
4 of Justice. We are interested in getting the job done no
5 matter who does it, but getting it done right as soon as
6 possible.

7 Now, I went to a meeting of the executive working
8 group that has State and local prosecutors there, and they
9 said, Janet, you are talking great, but what happens when
10 we do not get that cooperation?

11 I had my home telephone number listed at home.
12 I did not have a public information officer. I returned all
13 my calls. I met with anybody that wanted to meet with me,
14 except unrepresented defendants. I cannot do that in a
15 Nation this big. But I can return law enforcement
16 leadership's calls when they do not get cooperation. I can
17 return U.S. Attorney and local prosecutor calls when they
18 do not get cooperation.

19 It is going to take time to develop these lines
20 of communication, but I just want you to know that I am
21 committed to that effort in every way possible. And if you
22 have problems along the way or if your members have problems
23 along the way, I really hope that they will call me as we
24 try to develop a great partnership in this effort.

25 The first summer job I ever had was with the

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1 sheriff's department in Dade County. I was in the
2 identification bureau. And then the second summer job I
3 had was in the same bureau, but with expanded duties. I
4 never thought that I would be in law enforcement, but it has
5 certainly been an extraordinary experience.

6 It has been a wonderful experience for me to ride
7 with law enforcement over these past 15 years on the streets
8 of the community that I love, and understand the terrible
9 problems that law enforcement faces -- to see an officer
10 hollered at, to see an officer treated with disrespect, and
11 now, to hear reports of officers being intentionally flagged
12 and shot at.

13 I think a police officer has the single most
14 difficult job of anybody I know. They have to make hard
15 legal decisions without going to law school, without being
16 able to prop their feet up on their desk and look at the law
17 books. They have got to do it while at the same time trying
18 to quell, in many instances, an angry crowd, render medical
19 assistance. And the great police officer, the police
20 officer that can be firm, fair and yet sensitive when
21 necessary is probably the single greatest public servant
22 there is. It is a difficult job, but it is one of the most
23 rewarding jobs.

24 And I think it is imperative that we support our
25 police.

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1 It has been interesting in these last several
2 weeks to work with communities around the country in the
3 application for grants under the \$150 million supplemental
4 community policing program. I again dictated to the rest
5 of the Department that we were not going to try to be
6 telling local police what to do. We wanted to try to answer
7 their inquiries. We wanted to answer them as quickly as
8 possible. We wanted to try to give them the information
9 that they needed to succeed in getting an appropriate
10 response from the Federal Government.

11 I did not want it to take forever, so we developed
12 a phone bank system. We trained people in how to respond.
13 We provided quality checks by calling back to make sure that
14 their questions had been answered. And I am so gratified
15 by the response that I have gotten back, indicating that
16 people were satisfied, that they had not had such
17 assistance, in terms of getting their questions answered in
18 Washington. And I want to continue that effort.

19 We have, I think, at the end of the deadline this
20 past Friday -- the Fed-Ex apparently was blocking the
21 doorways into the basement of the Justice building -- we
22 have, I believe, over a thousand applications from both
23 large and small departments. And we want to make sure that
24 we review those as fairly as possible, again, getting the
25 questions answered.

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1 But it was clear to me that one of the things we
2 have got to do is get police to the streets to support our
3 police officers. I even went over to the phone bank and
4 took a call one day. And when I answered the phone, he
5 says, you have got to be kidding.

6 (Laughter.)

7 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I said, no.

8 (Laughter.)

9 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: But I said, I had better
10 let you have somebody else answer the question so I do not
11 confuse you.

12 (Laughter.)

13 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: It was interesting to hear
14 his response, and the response of so many others through the
15 people who had been handling the calls. We need to get that
16 crime bill passed. We need to put aside partisan rivalries
17 and just get it done in the right way. We have got
18 disagreements about a variety of issues. Let's sit down and
19 talk them out.

20 But it has never been as clear to me that we need
21 to get support for police to our streets in programs and
22 fashions that the police and the communities want. And I
23 think we have shown by the number of applications that we
24 have gotten that the communities want this support.

25 One of the things that touched me was the number

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1 of calls and expressions of need that we got from rural
2 communities throughout this Nation. We have seen a
3 significant pattern, where more urban police have done their
4 job so well that the problem is moving into the country,
5 into the rural areas, who oftentimes do not have the
6 infrastructure to deal with it. We can do so much.

7 I also wondered what the reaction to community
8 policing would be as I came to Washington, because we had
9 had a remarkable success with it in Miami. And I am just
10 encouraged by reports I get from police officers around the
11 Nation, both from chiefs and from line officers, telling me
12 how effective it can be when it is done right, when you
13 involve people, when you target problems in the community.
14 They can and are working, and it is really gratifying to see
15 that response around the Nation.

16 I just ask all of you to join with me. Let's get
17 the crime bill passed. One of the things that I have said
18 is I do not want to campaign for a crime bill that does not
19 have actual dollars associated with it to make sure that
20 those dollars are there for police officers on the streets.
21 I do not want to be involved in phony promises. I want to
22 be involved in getting up to 50,000 police officers on the
23 streets in community policing programs over the next five
24 years that can truly help the police departments and local
25 police of America. And I am dedicated to working with you

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1 in that effort.

2 The next point I think we have got to address, and
3 it again becomes so important. Everywhere I go in the
4 United States now, people are asking about guns. They have
5 become horrified by what guns do. We have got to get Brady
6 passed. We have got to get the ban on assault weapons
7 passed. And we have got to get laws prohibiting our kids
8 from having guns except in supervised situations.

9 Now, everybody says, well, Janet is against guns.
10 I am against guns in the hands of people who do not ought
11 to have them. And one of the interesting things I would be
12 called on to do as a prosecutor in Dade County was to debate
13 the NRA. And I began to chuckle when everybody -- crime and
14 the newspapers would say, Janet Reno is going to debate the
15 NRA, because it never turned into a debate.

16 I discovered that there were two branches to the
17 NRA, those that were against any regulation, and they never
18 showed up at the debates, and the others who understood that
19 you should not put a handgun in the hands of somebody who
20 did not know how to use them and were not trained.

21 And I think that there is a basic approach in
22 America that understands that assault weapons that have no
23 sporting purpose whatsoever do not belong in the hands of
24 people on our streets; that we ought to be able to check to
25 make sure that people are qualified to have guns, and that

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1 guns do not belong in the hands of our children unless they
2 are properly supervised in terms of training them about
3 weapons.

4 Working together, I think we can make a difference
5 in that regard. And we have got to get that package passed.

6 One of the points that I do not want America to
7 forget, because victims taught me more than anybody else,
8 I think, in terms of the whole process -- not even a police
9 officer could come as close as a victim to telling me what
10 it was like to have been the victim of a crime, to sometimes
11 be victimized again a second time as they came through the
12 processes of the courts.

13 There are so many wonderful victims programs
14 throughout the Nation, Mothers Against Drunk Drivers and
15 others, who have taught me so much about what the system
16 needs to do. And the Department is dedicated to trying to
17 provide that support and technical assistance that will make
18 sure that America never ever forgets its victims again.

19 But, finally, and I wondered how this would sell,
20 and I think Bud can tell you, it was police officers, more
21 than anybody else, who said, Janet, you have got to start
22 doing something about children. I see the children that I
23 come in contact with. I see them at 12 or 13. I go to
24 school in response to a call of the school, here is a kid
25 whose world has fallen away from him. You have got to do

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1 something about it.

2 I went out to Salt Lake City, and I started --

3 (End of side A of tape.)

4 (Side B of tape blank.)

5 (End of transcript.)

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