

**REMARKS OF ATTORNEY GENERAL JANET RENO
TO
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF POLICE ORGANIZATIONS**

**August 12, 1994
Minneapolis, Minnesota**

Thank you so much Tom. There's something very special about this evening to me, and it involves all of this country, all of this nation. It was about seventeen months ago that I suddenly found myself in Washington being considered for Attorney General. I was suddenly nominated and then I was told I should meet with some police organizations. And from that cold February day on Bob Scully and Tom Scotto have been with me every step of the way. Sometimes pushing me, sometimes fussing at me, sometimes prodding me, but I know they're there for law enforcement, for getting a crime bill passed that can make a difference.

At your January board meeting we talked about how to do it, where they were pushing 'You've got to have this commitment.' Again, they have represented you so well. All of you have been there when we've needed you in terms of criminal law issues that are so critical for this nation.

But now as I come here this evening, I see Bill Johnson who was an Assistant States Attorney with me in Miami, now with the PBA in Palm Beach. Linda Lolzzo who probably taught me about community policing in North Miami Beach as I served as a prosecutor in Dade County. And then I suddenly hear from the PBA in Highland Park, Michigan, who was absolutely wonderful to me that day, and somebody else comes up to me and says, 'I saw you in this community.'

And what I am seeing around this nation is a network of police who are on the front lines of bringing America's communities together again. Police who are reaching out to all the community, to the young, to the elderly, to business people, to teachers, and bringing the community together by involving them, by using them to identify problems and to establish priorities. Police believing in people who can make a difference. Police believing in people who, given half a fighting chance, can do so much to be self-sufficient. The network that exists in this nation through people who care, through dedicated law enforcement officials, is just extraordinary and this nation should be so proud.

It has been an incredible year and a half for me. I love this country. I love its people, but never have I loved it so much, nor been so proud of

its people as I have in this last year and a half. The average people I meet in America's communities who are doing so much to work with their police officers, to support their teachers, to make their communities, to help their young people have a positive future is so incredible. The elderly citizen who is volunteering at a police substation, who's become the police mascot if you will, is just so incredibly proud of what she's doing, and her community police officer with whom she's working says, 'I couldn't do it without her.' The young person who's volunteering to tutor students five years behind is making such an incredible difference.

Americans believe so much in their country. They are so proud of their country. They want so much for their country to be the nation they all expect it to be, but they're concerned, they're frightened, they don't know what's going to happen to their communities and they want answers. They want answers that can give them a community safe enough to come together to help build the fabric of society around children at risk. They want communities that are safe enough to protect our elderly people.

They want a crime bill passed that can make a difference. They want a crime bill passed that will put police officers on the streets where

they can count, where they can make a difference. They want enough prisons to house the dangerous offenders for the length of time the judges are sentencing them. Too many people have been in the same boat that you and I have been in where you see somebody prosecuted, we take them to trial, we avoid the plea bargain, we get the right sentence, and then we turn around and see them out in twenty to thirty percent of the sentence because we don't have enough prison cells. They want prison cells to house that dangerous offender but they also recognize that there are some people going to prison with a drug problem. They don't want to see them go to prison, sit in the prison and come out without having the drug problem treated because they'll be right out doing it again. They want answers. They want policing. They want punishment. They want prevention, and look what happened yesterday.

Yesterday was a set-back. Yesterday two-hundred and twenty-five members of Congress put procedural wrangling over the people. They put political bickering above the people. They put partisan politics about the people. They put the NRA above the people. I think we've got to change that. I think we all, whether we be a police officer of the line, a police official, a person in a community far away from Washington, an

Attorney General, all of us have got to say, 'Yesterday was a set-back but we are not going to give up.' Police officers don't give up. Attorneys General don't give up. Presidents of the United States don't give. School teachers in difficult situations don't give up. Housewives don't give up. It is time that we go forward and with one voice let America hear now we want a crime bill passed.

Let's make sure that Congress understands what we're talking about in people terms. That we want to put people above procedure and wrangling about rules. We want to talk in terms of the fourteen year old child murdered in her bedroom and we want to put into flesh and blood terms of what crime is doing to America. And we want to say we waited for six years to get a crime bill passed. Let's stop talking about the rules and let's get the crime bill passed and passed now.

The people want us to put people above political pussyfooting. The elderly person who feels trapped in their apartment, who has bars in their window, who won't go out except in certain circumstances, who feels they are a prisoner; they want more police on the streets to support you because they see the job that you're doing when they're able to see you. They don't want to think anymore of crime being a Democrat or a

Republican issue. They don't want partisan politics involved in solving the crime problem. They want common sense. They want funding. They want a tough, smart crime bill passed and passed now.

The people and the police who protect them should be put above the NRA. They don't want to see their police outgunned. The people don't want to see the young people of America shot down on our streets. They want a bill passed and passed now. And they don't want the NRA controlling what happens to America.

We can make such a difference because of you. Because of people like you who not only serve your communities, but then go beyond your communities to come to Washington to let the people's voice be heard. To let the people's voice be heard loud and long. I can't thank you enough for the support that you've given the Administration. The support that you've given to me. The support that you've given to efforts to get a solid crime bill passed that can make a difference.

And I want to thank the members of the Minnesota Congressional Delegation who I think have just been magnificent in this whole effort. Representatives Minge, Oberstar, Penney, Sabo, and Vento. And Congressman Jim Ramstad who put public safety ahead of partisanship

and voted to support the crime bill. These are Congressmen who are listening to the people and understanding what the people of America want now.

Let's make very clear as we prepare for these next few days in the effort to get a crime bill passed just what's in that bill. Monies for one-hundred thousand community police officers on the streets where they count. I have traveled this nation. I have watched community policing work. I have watched community policing bring neighborhoods together. I have seen in south central Los Angeles, as I walk into an elementary school and ask a little kid 'What do you want to be when you grow up?' They look over my shoulder. They look past the mayor and they say, looking at the community police officer, 'I want to be a police officer when I grow up.' I go to south Dallas and walk with a community police officer along a business lane. Businessmen come out to say what a difference that she has made in making that community safer, in improving business for them because the community is safer. I come then to a school and an eighteen year old stands up and says that for so long she never trusted cops, but now she'd met this community police officer and her colleagues and suddenly she found that they were her

mentor, not her enemy. That community police officer and her colleagues were bringing the community together again. And then I watched three young men come from Dorchester, Massachusetts to Washington to tell the President of the United States what police officers had done for them. Into trouble, on the verge of getting into deeper trouble, community police officers had reached out and through example, through mentoring, through supervision, had pulled these guys back into positive pursuits that could make a difference.

And these same officers that I've talked to across this nation put their lives on the line. They've exposed themselves to danger. They've been hurt protecting this nation. We need to give you the support to do the job. We don't need to talk about it. We don't need to fuss about it. We just need to do it and get the bill passed to get those officers to the streets where they count.

But not just getting officers to the streets to help you; getting officers to the streets with some advantage. Getting officers to the streets with the knowledge that we're going to begin to decrease the supply of assault weapons in this nation by getting the ban on assault weapons passed. Ladies and gentlemen, that bill has been passed by the

United States Senate with your help. That bill has been passed by the United States House of Representatives with your help. It should now be passed by Congress. The people have spoken. It's clear and the NRA should not control the voice and the will of the American people. We have got to get that passed as part of the crime bill.

But if we have the officers on the streets, your response was a while back, 'O.K. We put the officers on the streets, one of our problems is as soon as we get somebody arrested they're right back on the streets before we get back ourselves from filling out the paperwork.' We have got to make sure we have places to put these people that you arrest. Appropriate places. We have got to make sure that we get this crime bill passed to provide direct grants to state and local governments to have sufficient prisons to begin to house people for the length of time the judges are sentencing them.

Nothing is more frustrating, as I have said, than to prosecute somebody, to put your life on the line arresting them, to get them convicted, and find them out in twenty to thirty percent of the sentence because we don't have enough prison cells. This bill will provide for prison cells to house dangerous offenders. We need to get it passed to

help achieve truth in sentencing in this nation. But we also need to get the federal penalties passed that provide for "Three Strikes You're Out". I used to get frustrated as a prosecutor and I'd take my third time armed robber off to Federal Court because I knew I could get a stiffer sentence. But I wanted an even stiffer sentence. If somebody's robbed once and gone to prison, robbed twice and gone to prison, the next time they ought to be out for good. Let's get the bill passed that provides a sound "Three Strikes and You're Out".

One of the issues that's been raised in these last weeks is the word pork. And I think if you trace pork it would probably go to the NRA who knew that they couldn't win the battle talking about guns, so started talking about pork. Let's understand the facts. The bill passed by the House of Representatives in April contained more spending for prevention programs than the conference report provides. And fifty-four Republicans voted for that bill when it was passed in April. If you want something that's lean, mean, tough and smart, it's this conference report. And don't let anybody say that the conference added pork, because you know what the conference report added? When this bill was passed in the House of Representatives in April it only provided for a little over three billion

dollars for fifty thousand cops. The conference report brought it up to a little over eight billion dollars for one hundred thousand cops. Fifty thousand cops, ladies and gentlemen, isn't my idea of pork. It's my idea of community safety and let's get it passed.

But what is prevention? It's you who have told me how important prevention is. It's people like Linda, who've worked in a community and have watched a kid grow up and known that if there had been resources in that community to give that kid an alternative, her officers wouldn't be arresting him, I wouldn't be prosecuting him, and we wouldn't be sending him to jail. We have got to have enough prisons for those who commit crimes. We've got to let young people know that if they commit a robbery there's going to be a youthful offender facility that's going to punish them so that they understand you can't put a gun up beside somebody's head and hurt them. That there's no excuse for doing that. Not poverty, not broken homes, not where you came from. You don't hurt other people. But at the same time, we can do so much in terms of giving kids positive opportunities, something to say yes to. Something to say yes to so that they can say no to gangs, and drugs, and violence. Don't let people snow this country about prevention programs. We've

seen them work in every single community that I've visited. Police have oftentimes been instrumental in making them work. This can be such a solid provision that can make such an important difference. This bill is a comprehensive bill. It's been put together by talking to people. By listening to Scully when he comes in and fusses at me and says, 'We need more of this.' It's been put together listening to police officers on the beat. It's been put together listening to people who are on the front line. It's been put together listening to the people of America.

There is such a movement out there. There is so much good that is happening in America's communities that Washington doesn't see. Police officers are working with school teachers, working with businessmen, forming partnerships, bringing communities together. There is a sense in the American people that if they're given just half a chance they can make such a difference for the future of the next generation. We have a golden opportunity in the next few days, ladies and gentlemen, to let the American people be heard all the way to Washington. And let Washington know, that the people of America, the people of America come first.

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