



ANTIDEFAMATION LEAGUE LUNCHEON
ADDRESS OF ATTORNEY GENERAL JANET RENO
THE MAYFLOWER HOTEL
1127 CONNECTICUT AVENUE, NORTHWEST
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P R O C E E D I N G S

MS. RENO: I just want to thank you all of for the opportunity to be here today with you to express my gratitude of long-standing for your constant vigilance, for your being such a remarkable force against bigotry, against hatred and against the evil that sometimes we see in this country.

You've said some nice things about me, but let me hasten to add, I didn't reduce the crime rate. Americans have been working together to reduce the crime rate, through prevention programs that can make a difference; through fairer and firmer punishment; through re-entry programs that can enable people to come back to the community with a chance of success. It is all America that is doing it.

I ask you, thought, let us not become complacent. Crime is down six years in a row, but if we become complacent we will turn and it will be right back up, and we will have to accept the culture of violence that has too often been a part of this land. I say to you, we don't have to accept it. We don't have to say that this is a fact of our life. We can make the difference, we can make the difference across this land. And things don't get better if we don't try. The tragedy of

Littleton requires that we come together and not with blame, but with hope. Not with anger but with the logic, how can we look at this and see what can be done to prevent it. That is the spirit that I felt coming back from Littleton last week.

I looked out on an audience of parents, teachers, students, administrators, law enforcement officials, first responders, who grieved with all their heart and soul, but in the middle of their grief they came together and said we're going to be known as the community that overcame this adversity. That is the American tradition, and that is the tradition we must follow here.

We must not jump to conclusions as to how to cope. We must sit down, and in a thoughtful, careful but not too deliberative way, figure out what we can do as a federal government; what we can do in our communities; what we can do with our students to give them a chance for the future.

We've got to learn to talk to our students, and get them to talk to us. There's nothing quite so wonderful as a young person who has good ideas and finally starts talking, and sometimes it's just like a fountain that has been opened up, because they want to configure, they want to make a difference, they want to be somebody that makes a difference that helps other people.

I will tell you a story of Winston-Salem, North Carolina, where I visited now two weeks ago. I went to a school for adverse children. The police department had it's basic law enforcement training program in the school.

The superintendent and the principal and the police chief decided that it would be a good thing for the trainees at the basic law enforcement academy for the Winston-Salem Police Department to be the mentors for the kids who were at the school.

I sat with five trainees and with a number of young people. One young person said, I hated the cops. I ran the other way. I didn't like them. I didn't trust them. And these guys would talk to me and I'd turn around and walk the other way. And then I started to listen, and they had something to say.

And then we had the best conversation, those trainees and those young people, and the young people had something to say, ladies and gentlemen.

We have got to make sure that we have that communication in place, that we listen to their signals when they need help, when they are in trouble, when they want somebody to understand how they can cope in this day and time. And it's not easy.

But there is one common recommendation that flows through so many ideas that we should consider as we figure out what we can do. The Conference of Mayors last fall met in Salt Lake City to consider a platform for school violence and what could be done about it. One of their first recommendations, a recommendation generated by a police chief, not by a school counselor, was let's in addition to policing in the schools have school counselors in the schools that can make a difference, 100,000 school counselors.

If we provide counselors plus the mental health expertise, we can identify the problem before it starts. For too many people, they propose to wait till it's all over. I say let's prevent it before it starts.

(Applause.)

But there will be kids in trouble. Let us make sure we have a juvenile justice system that serves our kids. If you look at the average counselor in America today they have a case load so large, and resources so limited, that they could not begin to help the kid who had become delinquent and who needed to get off on the right foot.

But most of these children are redeemable if we develop a system that provides support in the juvenile justice system that permits an appropriate proper exchange of information between schools, law enforcement and the community, so that we know what the ingredients of success are for a kid we're trying to help.

And many people say the juvenile justice system doesn't work. We haven't given it a chance to work, because we wait until a terrible crisis occurs down the line. Let us look at how we can invest in a justice system that gives our kids a chance.

(Applause.)

One of the common denominators of so many of these tragedies, whether it be in a school in a suburban area or on the streets of the inner-city areas of this nation, is the common denominator of guns. Guns are in the hands of young people. I apologize for being late today, but I think you will understand that I was with the president as he made one of the best statements I have heard in a very long time about guns and how we finally have to come to our senses and say it doesn't make sense to let children have guns. It doesn't make sense --

(Applause.)

He made an announcement of what he is proposing to send to congress, and with him were some 40 members of congress, a bipartisan group from congress. And congress said to the people, Carolyn McCarthy has seen the tragedy of guns and been the victim of the tragedy of guns, said let your voice be heard, was her message. We will not be able to do it by ourselves. The voice of the American people must be heard as we consider this legislation and try to pass common sense proposals that can truly make a difference.

The president said now, some of you will say it won't make much of a difference. All of these bills can make a difference. One life is a difference, ladies and gentlemen. One life saved from a gun in the hands of people who don't belong to have them. Let us start making sense about guns and let the voice of the American people be heard.

But there are other issues that we must face. We've got to focus on how to build trust between young people and law enforcement. I told you the story of the young man in Winston-Salem. Since then I've had an opportunity to talk with others.

Most police officers want to do a good job, they want to serve, they want to make a difference. They put their life on the line for us day in and day out. But some make decisions based on race. Some violate the rights of others. We must, and we will continue to take effective action, in regards to those issues. But we must do everything we can to teach police officers how to relate to their community and involve the community, and involve the community in what are the priorities of our neighborhoods, what do we want addressed by police, how can we help the police, how can the police become the mentors of our young people rather than those that they distrust.

I am so pleased to see people responding. Police chiefs, the rank and file across this country, to say look, we want to solve this problem because professional policing cannot be effective unless we have the trust of the people. And that is underway, and I just commend all of those who have been involved.

I would like to bring you up-to-date on some other points, because I feel like I report to you on a regular basis. And you keep me on my toes.

It has been over two years since President Clinton nominated Bill Long Lee to be the assistant attorney general for the civil rights division. During this time he has served as the acting assistant attorney general, and I think he's done a wonderful job. But the senate has not yet held a vote on his nomination. But thank you for the endorsement you gave Bill Long Lee, and I hope the senate will act

expeditiously to give its consent to the president's nomination. We need him badly.

(Applause.)

At the same time, committed individuals need adequate resources. Attorneys in the civil rights division have dedicated their lives to promoting civil rights, but more resources are necessary. That's why President Clinton has called on congress to provide 82.2 million dollars in funding for the civil rights division in fiscal year 2000, which is a 19 percent increase over fiscal year '99. This money can be used to hire new attorneys as well as support personnel to focus on civil rights issues such as prosecuting hate crimes and combatting issues of police misconduct.

With respect to hate crimes generally, some individuals would divide our nation along racial or philosophical lines that had nothing to do with the content of an individual's character. The case of Matthew Shepherd who was murdered in Wyoming because he was a homosexual, and the case of Jasper, Texas, where a man was beaten and dragged to death behind a truck because of the color of his skin, demonstrate the cold-hearted cruelty that some individuals harbor towards others solely because of race or religion or lifestyle.

The public outcry to me was a good sign that the great vast majority of Americans will not tolerate bias-related crime. I was particularly gratified that state and local law enforcement on both occasions took the lead, for I think it is important that communities and law enforcement in the community vindicate the rights of the citizens of that community, for I think it will, in the long run, establish a stronger foundation for civil rights and for a rejection of hate across this country, if we all are involved in the effort to protect civil rights.

But some communities are small, more rural communities, and they have fewer resources to cope with situations like this. That was the case of Jasper County, Texas. But in that county, the district attorney and the sheriff were dedicated and committed to doing what was right.

I'd like to share a letter with you that speaks of a partnership that I tried to create with local law enforcement. It is from the district attorney who prosecuted the first case, and who won the case and won a conviction.

In between trials I want to specifically thank the Justice Department and Mike Bradford, who is the United States Attorney for that area, for all the help, cooperation and assistance provided in the first case. Without your intense

concern the result in efficiency of King's trial could not have been accomplished. We are deeply indebted to Mike Bradford as well. I personally leaned heavily on Mike's reasoning and logic throughout the preparation and presentation of this case. Effective and efficient trials are the direct result of cooperative labor. We cannot adequately express the degree of appreciation for all help we received.

That is partnership. That is making sure that everyone knows that we are going to seek vindication at every level of the criminal justice system. But there will be situations, few and far between, I hope, where the state may not act for a variety of reasons. And then the federal government must be prepared to protect the civil rights of all Americans.

Our jurisdiction is currently limited, and for that reason last year President Clinton sent his Hate Crimes Act to congress. It was not acted upon, so we have sent it forward again, and we are very hopeful that this time the legislation will become the law of the land.

This Act would extend our primary Federal Hate Crimes Law to cover crimes motivated by bias against sexual orientation, disability and gender and allow us to federally prosecute serious crimes against race, color or national origin, regardless of whether or not the victim was engaged in one of the six federally-protected areas.

I have been in office a little over six and a half years. I have dealt with some of the most difficult issues from Waco to Oklahoma City to now Littleton. But I have also seen the strength and the greatness of this nation. I have seen the strength and greatness of the young people of this nation. They are so remarkable. They want to contribute to the future.

I have seen the strength of the elderly person who, because of a community policeman is now unafraid to come out from behind her door, go down to the community center and give somebody a piece of her mind as to what should be done to improve her community.

I have seen communities come together and I have seen crime reduced. But I think it is time for Americans to start talking to each other again. We don't sit on the front porch and talk that much. We sit in our air-conditioned homes and watch TV.

We don't go down to the community center that much. We sometimes don't even vote. We don't spend time with our children as much. In fact I look at the ages in this room and I suspect that you remember as I do afternoons and evenings after

school. My mother worked in the home. My father worked downtown. We got in arguments, but we had enough time to get through the arguments, to get onto other things with each other and learn how of ourselves to resolve conflicts.

My mother taught us to play baseball, to appreciate symphonies. She taught us how to play fair. She punished and she loved us with all her heart and soul. There is no childcare that will ever be a substitute for what she was in our life.

Somehow if we're going to go back to being a community, we're going to have to develop work places where parents can spend quality time with their children. Ladies and gentlemen, if we can send people to the moon, certainly we can organize a work place through telecommuting, through two shifts, through shifts that permit parents to get to work and then at a certain point to pick up their children after school, we can organize work places in America that continue to provide the work force with the skills necessary to fill the jobs and maintain this nation as a great nation, and gives parents the time to be with their children to try and restore a sense of community, a sense of communication, a sense of caring that is too often missing for too many young people in this world.

I don't think sometimes hatred comes from evil. It comes from people who don't know where to go or who to lean on, and they lash out. Let us reach out across this nation to reweave the fabric of community around those children and others who are at risk of hate, and let us restore love to this land.

(Applause.)

THE CHAIRMAN: Madame Attorney General, we have proudly stood and worked with you since this department and this administration to bring the promise of America closer to reality. We believe passionately that people can make a difference. We have not hesitated, nor will we ever hesitate, to stand up and firmly say no to hate, bigotry, to racism and anti-semitism.

Madame Attorney General, you are a valiant warrior. You are our general in so many ways in the struggle for justice. We respect, we appreciate, we value your courageous leadership. You have been and continue to be a vital sensitive voice, not only on behalf of law enforcement, but on behalf of civility, on behalf of sensitivity and on behalf of respect of one individual for another.

And we value the fact that you do come to share with us, not to report, for we are partners in this struggle. And from the bottom of our hearts, we wish you continued success and good health, because we need your courageous leadership tomorrow and the days beyond.

Thank you very, very much.

(Applause.)

MR. MOSS: The Attorney General has indicated that she will take a few questions, so we will follow the same protocol as always. We'll go across the room to the various microphones. We'll start at the far left of the room. Name and region, please, and please, because time is so short, questions, not speeches. We know you've done a great job so far. Just keep it up.

Name and region, please?

MS. MAXTON: Mae Maxton from Miami, Florida. I'd like to move to another issue of great importance to ADL, and that's the concerns of anti-semitism in Russia, and I understand that you on occasion have the opportunity to interact with attorneys general in Russia, and I wonder if this couldn't be an opportunity for you to, at some level, to speak to them regarding the concerns of the United States on this issue?

MS. RENO: I will follow up with what I have tried to do, since in foreign matters the secretary of state takes the lead, is work with Madeleine Albright in every way that I can, and at the earliest opportunity I will discuss with her what I might be able to do that would relieve your concerns.

MR. SALVER: Michael Salver from New York. My question concerns the anti-terrorism and effective death penalty act, and as you know, the ADL made it's brief in the 9th Circuit supporting the constitutionality of the act, and I was wondering if you could comment on the resources available, both the DOJ and the Treasury, to provide enforcement and to prosecute alleged violations under the act.

MS. RENO: I think if you ask U.S. attorneys and sector chiefs and the like they would tell you that they could always use some more resources, but I think generally we are staffed to address these issues, and frankly the subject matter of that is one of our highest priorities, and the director and I are committed to doing everything we can to make sure that resources are available properly to defend that.

MS. KRANTZ: Patricia Krantz, San Diego, California. Could you tell us, give us a hint about what the president's newest gun control initiative is going to consist of at this point?

MS. RENO: It will require child safety locks. It will increase the age of juveniles who are in possession of guns from 18 to 21. It will provide penalties, criminal penalties for parents who recklessly permit their children to have access to guns in the house. It will provide -- make the Brady Act applicable to gun shows. It will make juveniles subject to the Brady Act. Those with pending adjudication will not be able to possess a firearm.

I think that's a substantial part of the list.

MR. MOSS: We have time for only one more question.

MR. LUSKIN: Dick Luskin from Boston. My question is this: We all know that law enforcement resources are limited. There does law enforcement end and community responsibility and individual responsibility begin?

MS. RENO: I don't think that community responsibility ever ends, and I don't think law enforcement -- I think it is important for everyone to come together, and instead of saying that's your problem, that's your problem, it's everybody's problem. Youth in trouble, communities in trouble, the environmental situation, everybody should be in it together.

That doesn't mean that a person should take the law into their own hands. But I think that a community -- what touched me so much is on Wednesday, as I dealt with the issue of Littleton and prepared to go down there the next day, I was in Minneapolis where the business community including three or four of the top companies in Minneapolis and indeed in the nation had come together with law enforcement, with parks and recreation specialists, with a gentleman who was some 83 years old and had been working with kids, and their whole theory was, we're in this together.

So I think everybody is responsible. I don't think responsibility ends. And you'll say well, law enforcement shouldn't be involved in other things. One of the things that I will always remember are three young men standing in the Department of Justice, in the great hall, telling the president of the United States how these two big guys standing next to them in uniform, what these two police officers as their mentors had done to change their lives around.

We can all work together and stop saying that's your responsibility, that's mine. It's everybody's. Thank you.

(Applause.)

(Whereupon, at approximately 2:45 o'clock p.m., the conference was concluded.)