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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

ADDRESS BEFORE THE NATIONAL POLICE FOUNDATION

BY

THE ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES

THE HONORABLE JANET RENO

Thursday, April 8, 1993

[THIS TRANSCRIPT WAS PREPARED FROM A TAPE RECORDING.]

P R O C E E D I N G S

MODERATOR: As I mentioned before, there will be another general session after we hear from the Attorney General. The exact nature of the breaks in between will be determined by the length of the speech and the logistics. I hope you understand.

[Pause.]

[Applause.]

MODERATOR: Welcome back. As you know, we have the honor this morning to be addressed by the recently appointed Attorney General of the United States.

I would like to turn over the honors of making the introductions to the President of the Police Foundation, whom we have already met, Mr. Hubert Williams.

MR. WILLIAMS: It is my great honor to have an opportunity to introduce the Attorney General of the United States.

Janet Reno was nominated by President Clinton on February 11, 1993 and confirmed by the U.S. Senate on March 11th of this year as the 78th Attorney General of the United States.

From 1978 to 1983, Janet Reno was the State

Prosecutor for Dade County, Florida, one of the toughest crime areas in the nation.

Attorney General Reno served the 11th Judicial Circuit of Florida in this capacity since she was appointed by Governor Askew. She was Florida's first woman State Prosecutor and was reelected five times.

Prior to her appointment in 1978, Reno was a partner with the Miami-based law firm of Steele, Hector & Davis, where she served for two years. Prior to Steele, Hector & Davis, Reno acted as the Administrative Assistant to the Prosecutor for the State Prosecutor's Office from 1983 to 1986.

Reno was the Staff Director to the Florida House of Representatives Judiciary Committee. Prior to working for the State Legislature, she was in private practice for eight years as an associate with Brigham & Brigham and then as a partner with Lewis & Reno.

Let me say that it is with great honor and a great privilege that I have an opportunity to introduce to you Madam Attorney General Janet Reno.

[Applause.]

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: It is a great honor to be

here.

The first job I ever had in my life was in the Dade County Sheriff's Office in the Identification Bureau in the summer that I graduated from high school and was getting ready to go to college. And then in the second year during the summer, I worked again with the Crime Lab, and I have watched law enforcement grow throughout America, because then the Dade County Sheriff's Office was basically on three floors of our courthouse, a small courthouse, and the jail was also in the courthouse. And in those 35 years, we have watched the face of America change and the face of law enforcement change. But much of what I learned there and much of what police officers have taught me over these years is the foundation that brings me really to Washington.

I think the issues that you have addressed in this conference, the issues that will be addressed throughout America, are going to be solved not in this city, but in the communities of America.

They will not be solved by police by themselves. But police, I have become convinced, must take the lead. It is the police of America who are on the front lines, who are on the streets, who are in the daily contact with American

citizens, who translate the dreams of American citizens when they succeed and frustrate the dreams when they fail.

The message I bring today, both in terms of preventing the disorders that you've talked about in this conference, but more importantly in developing the police function for the future, is that somehow or another we have to look beyond our disciplines. Police and prosecutors and the courts have got to talk together.

And I think we have made great strides in that effort in the last ten years. But what frustrates me is that we think we've done the job when we get somebody arrested, prosecuted, and convicted, yet we know in our hearts they're going to be out in a relatively short time, because in many of our urban areas prison overcrowding will send the home in 20 to 30 percent of their sentence.

So it becomes imperative that police and prosecutors talk with correctional officials to develop new and innovative approaches.

But more importantly, it is the police officers, more than any single other group, that have told me again and again with eloquence that the problems are not going to be solved by police officers on the streets. They've got to

develop partnerships with school teachers, with social workers, with community organizers, with people in the community.

And what we basically have got to do is to come back to the people. In our attempts to be professional, in our attempts to achieve excellence, it seems to me that what we have done in America in the last 25 years is do the very best in our professions. Police have become more professional. They have met more together. Prosecutors have their meetings and their training programs and their continuing education programs. Judges have their National Judicial College. The American Correctional Association has its meetings.

But there are very few times that I see us meet together. There are very few times that I see us meet with the National Education Association or the National Association of Social Workers. And we don't understand how to start to reweave the fabric of society around communities where it has been really stripped away.

I think we can do it, and the group that makes me most believe that are police officers, because police officers, the good police officers, at every level of a

department are the people who have shown me how.

It's the police officer on the street, who is not a community police officer; he's in uniform; he's in a car, but he takes the time to stop by that elementary school and to know the teachers and to know the ministers in the area, and he can do so much more in terms of investigation and detection, as well as in prevention, just by that extra effort in reaching out.

It's the Chief of Police who says: We're not going to do just stings; we're going into the community and work with the community and get community advice as to what the problems are. We're going to have a long-range lasting strategy with respect to a particular neighborhood. We're going to talk to the people in the neighborhood and involve them.

I think the answer to civil disorder in America, the answer to police problems in America, the answer to jail overcrowding and all the problems that we see is -- the one answer is that government must go back to its people. It must believe in its people as being the group that will really in the long run have the answers. It's not us telling them; we know better. This is a government of the people, by

the people, and for the people.

But one of the problems that exists in America is that too many people feel disenfranchised. They sit behind doors, and they glare out at officialdom in whatever its form -- a building inspector, a HUD manager, a police officer -- and they don't believe that person. They won't come out. They won't bring their child to the clinic down five houses away because they are suspicious and unbelieving that government really cares.

If we are to address the problems that plague America, it seems to me that all of us working together are going to have to join in a major effort to take government literally and physically back to its people.

I want to establish a message here in Washington that I want to do everything I can to take Washington to the people.

I was saying just a few minutes ago that when I headed an office of 900 in Miami for 15 years, I could return all my phone calls. My home telephone was listed. I responded to every police inquiry I could; I responded to every media inquiry I could, sometimes with a "no comment"; I can't comment on a pending case. But nonetheless, I responded

and returned the call.

With 95,000 employees in 50 states, I know that's not possible. But I want to work through groups like you to get Washington back down to the people.

I want a Department of Justice that is a true partner with local law enforcement. I have been on the receiving end of the Department of Justice telling me: No, you can't do that; we know better. I want a new approach, which is as a team we talk together with mutual respect, mutual regard, about what the best thing to do is.

I look at a bureaucracy here in Washington that has grown over ten times in probably 30 years, and I look at police officers on the street strapped for resources. I want to try to see that wherever possible the resources of Washington and the resources of the Federal Government go to the streets and to the communities of America to reinforce what you do day in and day out.

But as we do that, I hope we then form the partnerships in our communities.

As a suggestion in terms of an effort that we started in Dade County, what about teams, teams composed of community-friendly, highly respected police officers, social

workers, public health nurses, community organizers, working together full-time as a team within a narrow neighborhood?

One of our problems is that we spread ourselves too thin, and we again become kind of top-down because we aren't in the neighborhood with the people.

But to get to the people, to get that lady to bring her child to the clinic, to get her to come out and talk to that public health nurse, so that she can advise her about infant nutritional programs, about immunization programs, we have got to break down that wall of suspicion and mistrust that exists at every level.

And to do that, that public health nurse needs to feel free to go knock on the door, and if she has that community-friendly police officer with her, she's going to feel more free to do so. And together they can address the problem of a family as a whole.

Now we have the police officer addressing the problem of the delinquent son, somebody else talking about the mother's problem, but nobody talking about the family's problem as a whole. If we address one problem in the family, three other problems will go unaddressed, and the lady will end up as frustrated as ever before.

But what we have got to believe in most of all is, yes, there are some bad people in this world, and we've got to prosecute them and convict them and get them put away for as long as we can ever get them put away. To do that, we're going to have to have enough prisons, and to do that, we're going to have to get some of the people in the prisons out, back to the community as constructive citizens, and use the prisons for what they were meant to be, places to lock up bad people for as long as we can get them locked up.

But those bad people are few and far between. There are other people that have gone over to the realm of the bad that we can pull back. There is that lady that six weeks ago would not come out from behind her door because she mistrusted people, who has seen some significant actions the government has taken that can mean something in her life in a realistic way, and she's beginning to believe in government; she's beginning to believe in that police officer, that social worker. She's beginning to come to meetings.

But then something else happens. She says: I want to get a job. And she gets a job. And she makes the minimum wage. And she suddenly discovers that she's worse off than if she hadn't gone to work in the first place, because she

loses benefits. And we've got to involve all of us in efforts to break through this federal bureaucracy that we have created to enable that woman to get off welfare and to see a light at the end of the tunnel and to be a constructive person. That lady wants to be off welfare.

Most of those juvenile delinquents that are causing so many of the crime problems that we see basically want to be self-respecting people who can participate and contribute and be constructive in their communities, but they kept taking the wrong road. They kept being beat down.

It's the police officers that are bringing them back. It is the police officer who will go down to Juvenile Court and say: Give that kid another chance, and let me take him home.

Now if that police officer sends him off to a program up in -- to use Miami as an example -- if they send him off to Lake Okeechobee and a youth camp up in Lake Okeechobee that has no real reference whatsoever to the inner city of Miami and expect him to sit up there for six months and come back without any transition whatsoever, that's going to be more of what we've done for the last 20 years.

But if that police officer takes him home to

community programs, to mentoring programs after school, to special programs that can make kids have creative, wonderful opportunities after school, we may pull that kid back. That kid is going to be one of those people participating in the civil disorders that you've talked about unless we pull him back now, unless we pull his sister back and give her an opportunity to do something besides sit at home with the first baby that she's had because she can't find child care for that baby and can't get back to school and watches her dreams frustrated at every step of the way.

Police officers have given me more of a sense of the possible, more a sense that we can address this problem, more the sense that we can have a real voice. I think police officers have got the hardest job of anybody I know. They've got to be lawyers without having gone to law school, most of them. They've got to make hard legal decisions within seconds on a street with an angry crowd. They expose their lives to danger day in and day out.

They can't sit with their feet propped up and decide what next to do about a case in too many instances. They've got to quell the angry crowd, provide first aid under very difficult circumstances, do so many incredible things.

Police officers are on the front line of America, and I would like to join with you in getting more people there to help you and in reweaving the partnerships of America, bringing all disciplines together, to take government back to the people with the police leading the way.

Thank you.

[Applause.]

MODERATOR: Thank you very much. We will now take a 15-minute break. We will resume the program as scheduled at 11:30. Thanks.

[End of tape recording.]