

1 SPEECH BY THE
2 HONORABLE JANET RENO,
3 ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES,
4 ON THE ADMINISTRATION'S EFFORTS
5 TO COMBAT VIOLENT CRIME
6

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8

9 Wednesday, October 15, 1993
10

11 The Great Hall
12 Department of Justice Building
13 901 Constitution Avenue, N.W.
14 Washington, D.C.
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1 GENERAL RENO: I appreciate your being here
2 today, and most of all I appreciate the people who have
3 come from far away, from communities, from States where
4 you are on the front line in the fight against violence
5 and the fight against crime.

6 As you know, I don't say that too lightly since
7 for too long I have labored in communities wondering when
8 the Federal Government would do something, and do it the
9 right way in terms of supporting communities.

10 But for 15 years I worked in a city that I love,
11 a city I was born in and cared deeply about. I sat with
12 children who had been victims of violence as we prosecuted
13 the cases involving that violence. I talked with
14 survivors of vicious murders and I understood in some
15 small measure that horrible empty feeling that violence
16 brings.

17 I have walked through neighborhoods that have
18 become battlefields, and those police officers here, those
19 prosecutors, those attorneys general know what I'm talking
20 about. You undoubtedly have been to living rooms of
21 elderly people who are afraid to go out, who have become
22 prisoners in their own house because of violence. I have
23 ridden with police who put their lives on the line every
24 day of the year and too often get shot at, get hurt, get
25 killed.

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1 I have watched prosecutors try to deal with the
2 problem day in and day out, against case loads that
3 stagger the imagination. I have watched attorneys general
4 throughout the country defend, in court after court, the
5 litigation that produced convictions to see that there
6 might be some vindication for such violence.

7 And more recently, I have had the opportunity to
8 work with dedicated people throughout the Department of
9 Justice and other Federal agencies who are as committed to
10 ensuring justice for all in America, justice free of
11 violence.

12 And this experience confirms again and again,
13 year after year, my firm unequivocal belief that Americans
14 have been, are, and will continue to be absolutely
15 outraged at violence. They consider it the first priority
16 of any criminal justice effort in America. They want
17 something done. They want something done in their
18 communities, in the State, and in this Nation.

19 But they have become numb, numbed by people who
20 make promises and then don't carry them out; numbed by too
21 many politicians who say we're going to solve the problem
22 by building a prison, and then the prison doesn't get
23 built or there are not operating expenses and the prison
24 stands there empty.

25 They are made cynical by promises that we're

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1 going to tough on crime, and we watch offender after
2 offender go away, and then we watch the person out in 20
3 to 30 percent of the sentence committing further crime.

4 The American people want answers to the problem
5 of violence, and they have far more sophistication, a far
6 more common sense view of how you go about doing it. And
7 what we want to do today is to take this opportunity, with
8 the Executive Working Group composed of State and local
9 prosecutors, the attorneys general, and Federal
10 prosecutors who are here.

11 We have some new U.S. attorneys here today. We
12 have a new leadership team in the Federal Bureau of
13 Investigation. And it seemed like a very appropriate time
14 to start talking about what the Clinton administration can
15 and is going to do about the issue of violence in America.

16 It's not a simple answer. It's not an easy
17 solution. It doesn't happen overnight because there have
18 been too many years of neglect. What's going to make the
19 difference is that people of good will come together, that
20 we put aside the politics and understand that violence is
21 of concern to Democrats and Republicans, to State and
22 local officials and Federal officials, to police officers
23 and persons in the community, to children and elderly,
24 that violence is a concern for us all. And that if we
25 start talking about it in common sense terms, if we start

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1 putting our dollars where our mouths are and start using
2 common sense approaches that balance punishment and
3 prevention, we can made a difference.

4 How do we do it? I think that the Clinton
5 administration's approach to this effort is best defined
6 with five key points.

7 First of all, we've got to have truth in
8 sentencing for the bad guys, for the career criminals, for
9 the dangerous offenders. I would too often turn around
10 and look at a case in Miami where we were prosecuting
11 somebody who had murdered somebody, and he'd been in out
12 in 20 to 30 percent of the sentence when we had convicted
13 him 3 years before.

14 The chief has seen this situation in Washington,
15 D.C. I wondered whether it existed around the Nation. I
16 have now had a chance to travel across this Nation and
17 understand just how frustrating it is for police officers
18 who see somebody arrested, see the prosecutor get a
19 conviction without a plea bargain, see the judge impose
20 the right sentence, and then see us have totally
21 inadequate correctional facilities to house those people.

22 We have got to work together, State and Federal
23 officials, to make sure that the prisons of this country
24 are used for the dangerous offenders so that they won't
25 commit violence again. We have got to make sure that

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1 there is coordination based on solid information.

2 When I came to Washington, I expected that I
3 would be able to bring law enforcement agencies around me,
4 that we would sit down and that they would present me with
5 monthly reports on crime trends in America that were
6 carefully coordinated between the Bureau of Justice
7 statistics, the uniform crime reports, drug forecasts, and
8 other efforts; that local governments would be involved in
9 that effort, and that we could see what was happening in
10 terms of crime in America.

11 I didn't find that to be the case, and so I have
12 asked and we have already had meetings on this issue, the
13 Deputy Attorney General to undertake an effort that I
14 propose will involved State and local officials who are
15 absolutely key to this effort in developing current real-
16 time crime information in the United States that can be
17 used by local governments, local police agencies, that can
18 be automated and easily available to you, and can be used
19 to make a difference and to develop sound strategic and
20 tactical planning in what we do.

21 This information can be invaluable if we get it
22 to you soon enough, but too often I've sat at my desk and
23 wondered in Miami, hmmm, this is an interesting Justice
24 Department publication, and I look at it and it's 2 or 3
25 years old. We have got to make a difference in terms of

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1 information that we get to you in ways it can help.

2 Secondly, we have a special responsibility in
3 the Department of Justice to implement the Vice
4 President's vision that we are going to have a coordinated
5 government that works right, that ends duplication,
6 fragmentation, and costly and expensive duplication that
7 could be used to put real crime fighting efforts on the
8 streets of this Nation.

9 I think the Federal agencies within the
10 Department of Justice are distinguished and excellent, and
11 each has a very important undertaking that must be
12 fulfilled. But we are absolutely dedicated to making sure
13 that the agencies in the Department are going to work with
14 other agencies, Federal, State and local, and that they
15 are going to work together in a common strategy that can
16 make a difference using each of their respective resources
17 in the wisest way possible.

18 But most of all, we have got to develop a
19 partnership with State and local government. I wondered
20 whether I was in the minority, but after having visited a
21 number of you in your own home towns and many of you at
22 meetings across this country, I have learned that you
23 yearn for a partnership with the Federal Government as
24 much as I used to in Dade County. I can do something
25 about it.

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1 You have a new director of the FBI who is
2 absolutely committed to this partnership, who has worked
3 with local law enforcement, knows what police officers on
4 the streets can do if they're given information that shows
5 patterns crossing State lines that impact on their
6 jurisdiction.

7 We can make a real difference if we trust each
8 other, work together -- work together from sound, factual
9 information that can enable us to develop the most
10 comprehensive strategies possible.

11 The next issue, however, is important. We have
12 got to back up our police. Police have the single hardest
13 job of anybody in the community. They put their lives on
14 the line. They have to make legal decisions without going
15 to law school. They have to make legal decisions in a
16 crowded alleyway at 2:00 in the morning without the law
17 library at their back and without being able to prop their
18 feet up on their desk and talk with their colleagues about
19 what charges to file. They've got to do it then.

20 They get criticized, pushed, and shoved. And
21 day in and day out the policemen and policewomen of
22 America do an incredible job on the cutting edge of the
23 difficult issues in our communities. We have got to back
24 them up.

25 And one of the first ways we can do that is to

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1 get the administration's crime package passed so that we
2 put police officers on the streets in ways that they can
3 help local departments, in fashions and manners flexible
4 enough to support and assist local departments in what
5 they want to do in developing sound and effective
6 community policing programs.

7 The Congress and the administration have passed
8 a \$150 million supplement to provide community policing
9 support throughout America. In the next 60 days we hope
10 to send monies out that will put 2,000 additional police
11 officers on the streets.

12 But we have tried to do it in ways that reflect
13 what we are doing in terms of a partnership in this
14 country. We have tried to link ourselves with local law
15 enforcement across this country through an extensive
16 communications program that gets questions answered now.

17 No longer do we have to write and say, well,
18 what about this, what about this. We have daily
19 telephonic communication with local departments answering
20 questions, going over grant applications, and trying to
21 make sure that we work with local departments to design
22 the delivery of these police officers in ways that you can
23 use them.

24 The time has come to get that bill passed. I
25 haven't found anybody that doesn't support putting 50,000

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1 police officers on the streets in ways that communities
2 can use them in the next 5 years. We cannot let that
3 crime bill get mired down in political bickering when
4 everybody agrees that this major initiative should get
5 passed and that we can make a difference in law
6 enforcement throughout this country.

7 Now, there are people in this room who about 8
8 months ago, when I first them over the old Executive
9 Office Building said, fine, you give me more policemen,
10 what are the courts going to do with them? I am even more
11 convinced of the correctness of the answer that I gave
12 then because I have seen what police departments around
13 this country are doing in terms of significant community
14 policing efforts that involved the community, that reflect
15 the community's priorities, that involve the community in
16 identifying problems and working together to solve those
17 problems.

18 That includes identifying the career criminal
19 who is the major ring leader, who is pulling all the
20 little gang members or wannabe's into the gang, and
21 getting that person prosecuted, convicted, and sent away
22 for a very long time. But it also includes community
23 policing efforts that identify the little wannabe's that
24 we can pull back real easily and get them back into
25 constructive services in our community. Community

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1 policing can be such an important effort. We have got to
2 get that bill passed.

3 And as importantly, we have got to send a
4 message to America that we will not get caught in what a
5 few people think should be done about guns. We should end
6 the rule of guns in America and get the Brady bill passed.
7 It makes absolutely no sense when I go out to community
8 after community, hear from people about what they think
9 should be done, listen to people, person after person say
10 why can't you get the Brady bill passed and have us
11 continue to talk about it.

12 One of the highest priorities of this
13 administration is to get that bill passed and to make a
14 difference. We can do it. We will provide efforts along
15 the way. We will get your questions answered. If you
16 have any concerns, you need only talk to us about problems
17 associated with people in your community, Congressmen,
18 Senators who may have questions about it.

19 But I am amazed that in 1993, in the civilized
20 world, truly dangerous people can walk into a gun store,
21 buy a gun, and walk out instantly. It doesn't make sense.
22 We must give the police time they need to check the
23 background of the gun buyers. The Brady bill will do
24 that.

25 Right now some States have waiting periods but

1 others don't, so handguns go from State to State. We have
2 got to make a national statement. America has waited long
3 enough for the Brady bill. It's time to get it passed.

4 Secondly, we must ban assault weapons. There is
5 absolutely no reason in the world why somebody in America
6 should be able to purchase an assault weapon that has no
7 sporting purpose to it whatsoever. We need for law
8 enforcement to speak out. The time has come when we have
9 got to galvanize our efforts together and speak out.

10 Clearly, prosecutors, police officers, attorneys
11 general, people who understand the impact of guns in the
12 community and what guns are doing to our communities can
13 have a longer voice and a louder voice than those few who
14 would try to control the gun lobby in Washington. We can
15 make a difference. This is one of the highest priorities
16 of the President, and I ask you to join with me in this
17 effort.

18 Third, we must keep guns away from kids. It
19 should be illegal for minors to possess guns without adult
20 supervision. These are all sensible proposals. They will
21 save lives, they will make a difference, but we need your
22 support in this effort.

23 How do we do this? How do we make these
24 differences? Yes, we can get the crime bill passed, and
25 we will. We can get the Brady bill passed, and we will.

1 We can get a ban on assault weapons passed. And we will
2 if we all come together, speaking as one voice for law
3 enforcement in America that says the time for political
4 rhetoric is over and we can make a difference.

5 But then your first question should be to me,
6 okay, you talk tough about putting these bad guys away.
7 How are you going to do it? Where are you going to find
8 the prisons? What are you going to do?

9 First of all, I think it's imperative that we
10 work with State officials, with the Federal Government to
11 make sure that the prison cells of this country are used
12 first and foremost to ensure truth in sentencing for what
13 I call the mean bads, the dangerous offenders, the career
14 criminals, and that we make a pledge that between us we
15 will have enough prison cells in America to house those
16 people for the length of time the judges are sentencing
17 them. And that for those people that we identify as truly
18 dangerous, we will work together to ensure through
19 partnership that we will get those people put away and
20 kept away.

21 Under the administration's efforts, we will have
22 36 prisons with 40,000 new prison beds, an increase of
23 almost 50 percent. But how can we help the States? First
24 of all, we need to explore how we can deal with illegal
25 aliens who are currently in State prisons. What

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1 responsibility does the Federal Government have?

2 I have always thought, as a local prosecutor,
3 what are we doing housing these illegal aliens? They
4 belong in Federal prison. And I have directed our office
5 to do everything possible to ensure an appropriate
6 responsibility on the part of the Federal Government to do
7 just that.

8 Secondly, some of these prisoners could be
9 transferred back to their own home country. It costs
10 \$20,000 a year to keep somebody in prison. For some of
11 these offenders, if they were back in their home country,
12 we could do it at a lot less cost, and we will be working
13 in that effort.

14 This past weekend I had lunch with the President
15 of Mexico in Mexico City. I discussed just this problem,
16 and he instructed his attorney general, and we told him
17 that we would work with him in terms of trying to work
18 with the States and with the Federal Bureau of Prisons to
19 return to Mexico those prisoners under appropriate
20 conditions that the State would want returned.

21 One area we can make a significant difference in
22 -- and we want again to work with you, not to take the
23 credit, not to say, hey, look at what we did, but to
24 support the local government, this local prosecutor in
25 every way possible. We have the Armed Career Criminal

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1 Statute. We can prosecute these people in Federal court
2 who are two and three and four-time convicted violent
3 offenders, people who shouldn't be on our streets again.

4 Now, some local prosecutors tell me, Janet,
5 that's fine, but sometimes your prosecutors take the case
6 and they grandstand with it and then we don't seem them
7 again for 6 months. We want to work with local
8 prosecutors, with the attorneys general, in developing a
9 common understanding of how we support you either by
10 cross-designating your prosecutors in Federal court, but
11 how we support you in using Federal resources properly,
12 according to principles of federalism to get the bad guys
13 put away and kept away.

14 We have seen so many patterns of violence that
15 cut across State lines, cut across district lines, and are
16 fed from one jurisdiction to another so that they really
17 aren't a State responsibility. I have asked the DEA, the
18 FBI, and the other Federal agencies to work together to
19 see how we might supplement and support local law
20 enforcement in prosecuting those who carry their criminal
21 violence across State lines so that, again, these people
22 go to Federal prison and we assume our responsibility for
23 incarcerating and incapacitating the violent offender who
24 does nothing but convey in traffic and violence across
25 State lines.

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1 We look at the major drug cartels that sweep
2 through this country in different forms, and we have got
3 to again make sure that we develop a local partnership
4 with law enforcement throughout this Nation to say, okay,
5 we don't want the credit for this prosecution, but we do
6 want you to be able to use Federal prison cells if you
7 don't have enough to make sure that we put the dangerous
8 offender who has cut across State lines, where Federal
9 jurisdiction is clearly involved, in prisons so that they
10 don't get out anytime soon.

11 One of the most important aspects of this crime
12 bill, however, is the provision for boot camps, and I'm
13 dedicated to doing everything I can to make sure there are
14 moneys to back up those boot camps so that we start
15 sending a message across America that when a 13-year-old
16 puts a gun up beside somebody's head, they know that
17 they're going to be punished, and that there is no
18 excuse -- not poverty, not broken homes, not where you
19 came from -- from hurting other people with guns, or
20 killing them, or robbing them, and that there has got to
21 be a consequence for their action.

22 I have spoken in school after school in these
23 last 7 months, and the first question that kids usually
24 ask me is, how come some kid can take a gun and hurt
25 somebody and get away with it? All these guys think they

1 can get away with it.

2 We have got to expand our efforts through boot
3 camps, through programs for serious juvenile offenders,
4 that lets them know they can't get away with it, but we
5 have also got to make a major commitment that these people
6 are coming back to our communities at some point. If we
7 just incarcerate them, lock them up and do nothing else,
8 they are coming back to commit further and probably more
9 horrible crime. In the process of these boot camps we can
10 do so much, develop programs that will help these
11 youngsters come back to the community with half a fighting
12 chance for succeeding.

13 We have got to understand that it doesn't make
14 any sense to take a person who's got a drug problem who
15 commits a serious crime and put them in prison, let them
16 serve only 20 to 30 percent of their sentence, and then
17 dump them back in the community without real punishment
18 and without doing anything to address the first cause of
19 the crime.

20 I look forward to working with you, to making
21 sure that we do everything we can to get the provisions in
22 the crime bill funded to provide a good carrot-and-stick
23 approach similar to the drug court program in Miami that
24 says, look, you can get prosecuted, or you can work with
25 us in terms of treatment, job training, and placement, and

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1 come back to the community with a chance of succeeding.

2 We have got to understand that we can't just
3 talk about punishment. We've got to understand that most
4 of these people that we send away to prison are coming
5 back sooner rather than later, and unless we take them
6 back with programs and procedures that can give them a
7 chance of success, they're going to be right back in your
8 courts, right back in our courts, every step of the way.

9 I would like to make clear something -- an
10 issue. I'd like to make very clear what the
11 administration's position is on an issue, because I hear
12 it asked about regularly, and I think Dr. Lee Brown would
13 echo what I say.

14 This administration is determined not only to
15 maintain but to enhance our efforts at drug enforcement in
16 the United States, to make sure that our dollars are used
17 in wise ways that have a difference and can make a
18 difference, that dollars are used both for punishment and
19 prevention, that we target major organizations, go after
20 the king pins, and take sufficient action, not just to
21 take one person out of the organization and put them away,
22 not count in terms of success people, but count in terms
23 of success organizations and systems of distribution so
24 that we disrupt it, and disrupt it sufficiently to make a
25 difference, but at the same time, we will never be able to

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1 win the battle unless we increase our efforts at
2 prevention, education, and treatment.

3 Prosecutor after prosecutor has told me one of
4 the most effective efforts within their community has been
5 the education, prevention, and treatment programs that can
6 make a difference. A balanced approach where we go after
7 the true organizations and disrupt them and put them out
8 of business, balanced with prevention, I think can have a
9 major impact on drug usage and the violence that it spawns
10 in America.

11 That's not going to be enough, and anybody that
12 thinks, just by incarcerating people, just by building
13 boot camps, just by doing something about drugs, that we
14 will make a difference, has ignored what is happening in
15 America, and I am here to tell you, and I think they will
16 echo it, that the prosecutors, the sheriffs, chiefs of
17 police, and the police officers on the line in America
18 will say that this Nation has got to start now in making a
19 major investment in children. That's what this
20 administration is all about.

21 Most everybody in this room has heard me talk
22 about a national agenda for children, but what it does is
23 reflect what the administration is all about, investing in
24 people, holding people responsible, trusting people enough
25 to believe that they can be accountable for their actions,

1 and holding them to task when they have violated the
2 spirit in which we have to live in this country.

3 We've got health care reform to pass. Governor
4 Riley, the Secretary of Education, is doing wonderful
5 things in terms of developing a real partnership in State
6 and local governments in making sure that we fashion a
7 partnership that can make a difference within a community.

8 The school-to-work program, the national service
9 program are all efforts to reflect the administration's
10 commitment to developing an environment and a society
11 where people can grow as strong, constructive human
12 beings, but we have got to dedicate ourselves to
13 recognizing that we will never be able to solve that
14 problem of a 13-year-old who puts a gun up beside
15 somebody's head unless we start a lot earlier, and we can
16 make a difference in providing proper health care for our
17 children.

18 All you have to do is turn around, and I bet
19 every single prosecutor in this audience has looked at
20 pre-sentence reports that talk about the child having had
21 some health problem that went untreated, or mother had a
22 crack problem that went untreated, or the child had a high
23 fever when they were 6 years old that went untreated, and
24 there were aggressive behavior problems that resulted.

25 We have got to make sure that the children of

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1 America have preventative medical care, that they have
2 safe, constructive educare. That child that wanders
3 across the housing development at age 5 unsupervised,
4 uncared for, without structure, without limits, without
5 punishment, is going to be the child that grows into that
6 violent person who's not really bad, but we just let the
7 world fall away from him.

8 Every prosecutor that I've talked to has seen in
9 their community what can be done by conflict resolution
10 programs in our schools that teach our children how to
11 peacefully resolve conflicts. Police agencies that really
12 can work together are showing what can be done with
13 truancy prevention programs. Through the Safe Schools
14 Act, through partnerships with communities, we can make a
15 difference.

16 It makes no sense for a police officer to take
17 an 8-year-old who has been truant 15 times in the first 40
18 days back to school and have the principal send him home
19 because nobody comes to get him when they call the
20 parents. That's the time when we should be making a home
21 visit to find out what's caused the whole world to fall
22 away from that child and leave him adrift in a community
23 afternoons and evenings.

24 We can make a difference if we form a
25 partnership, and that's what it's all about -- taking the

1 resources of America, understanding that much of what's
2 happening in America today, the great steps that are being
3 taken, the bold and innovative proposals, are being taken
4 in communities by prosecutors, police chiefs, educators,
5 social workers, nurses, doctors, working together to build
6 a fabric of community back around family and children so
7 that we can make a difference.

8 For too long, I was one of those in the Federal
9 Government, in the State government, that said, here comes
10 another Fed. They're going to tell us what to do. Or,
11 here comes another Fed that's going to offer us some money
12 but have so many strings attached that we're not going to
13 be able to use it.

14 The Clinton administration isn't talking to
15 local government that way. We're saying to local
16 government and to the States, you've got the hardest job
17 of anybody. You're on the front lines and we want to be a
18 partner, a partner between law enforcement, a partner
19 between the Department of Health and Human Services, the
20 Department of Education, local educators, local social
21 workers, all of us working together to make sure that
22 Federal dollars go to communities in ways that you can use
23 them.

24 We need your help in convincing people that this
25 partnership is the true way that we make a difference in

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1 terms of giving children an opportunity to grow, in terms
2 of using our resources, not just to dump dollars into a
3 community, but to give you dollars in ways that you can
4 truly fashion them to make a difference.

5 But most of all, everyone has got to understand
6 that Americans put violence first on their agenda for
7 something that they want action on. They don't want
8 rhetoric any more. They don't want promises any more.
9 They want hard work from people willing to make a
10 difference, make a commitment to work together. They
11 don't want people taking credit for solving the problem.
12 They just want somebody to do something about it.

13 It's time for us to do something about it, to
14 join together to make sure that we don't let the dangerous
15 offender out, that we join together to make sure that that
16 young, violent teenager knows he's going to get punished,
17 but that he has a chance of coming back into the community
18 with a chance of success.

19 We've got to get that crime bill passed to make
20 sure that police officers are supported, and that they no
21 longer feel that they are alone in their community,
22 subject to violence from the community itself. We have
23 got to get Brady and the ban on assault weapons passed.
24 We have got to make an investment in our future in terms
25 of raising children that are strong enough and positive

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1 enough and healthy enough to make a difference.

2 It has been so encouraging to meet with so many
3 of you around this Nation, to know how many people care so
4 very much. That voice has got to be heard at every level
5 of government now, and working together with the American
6 people, we can make a difference, and end this culture of
7 violence that has devastated this Nation for too long.

8 Thank you.

9 (Applause.)

10 (Whereupon, at 12:22 p.m., the speech ended.)

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