

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
ADDRESS BY
ATTORNEY GENERAL JANET RENO
OFFICE OF JUSTICE PROGRAMS CONFERENCE:
COMMUNITIES, CRIME AND JUSTICE:
MAKING COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS WORK
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P R O C E E D I N G S

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Thank you, Mike. That is a beautiful, beautiful part of the world, and anybody who goes to Portland is missing something if they don't take a chance to do that and to see that great river.

I appreciate the warm welcome, but I am the one who should be applauding you. I look around this room, and as I came in, I see people whom I have seen on their home ground, doing wonderful things in communities. I am convinced, and I think it's important to put it in an historical perspective, that communities are where it is all happening. As a prosecutor for 15 years, I developed this thought: it seems to me that with the Depression, people began to look to Washington during the Thirties as a place to get problems solved.

With World War II, people looked more often to Washington as the place that this nation's decisions were made. In the Fifties and Sixties, people looked to Washington for justice and civil rights. In the Seventies, they looked to Washington for money. Then, as many of you know, in the Eighties, Washington started shifting the programs to the states without dollars, and the states started shifting the programs to communities without dollars.

And communities across America, large and small, with their backs up against the wall and without a lot of money to fight about, started coming together and identifying their resources and making the best use of them and doing it in creative and bold ways that I think speaks volumes for the tradition of this nation as a bold nation willing to innovate, willing to create, willing to think of new ideas.

Thus, in my time, I never liked it when Washington came to Miami and said this is what you should do; this is the money we will give you for that, but we won't give it to you for that. And when I came to Washington, I resolved to try to build a partnership between the Department of Justice and local communities, realizing that you understand your needs and resources far

better than we do in Washington. We may have some technical expertise. We can provide technical assistance. In some instances, we can provide money. We can work together in law enforcement initiatives. But we must rely on you to understand what's necessary to build a strong fabric of community justice wherever you live.

And that's what I've tried to do ever since. In the development of the anti-violence initiative, I didn't want US attorneys going in and taking a case because they could get headlines. I wanted them to go in and talk to the local prosecutor and say what's best for the community? If it's better that it be tried in state court, let it be. If Federal investigators can share information with local police so that people can be brought to justice, I don't care who gets the credit. I want to make sure it's done with the best interests of the community at heart.

With that, it is important that we work together to establish the priorities, and that is what we have tried to do through the anti-violence initiative. The major traffickers; the organized drug dealers; how can we work together to identify the person who is trafficking in the guns that are getting to the teenagers? How can we work together to take those people out? Again, we are trying to do it based on each community and the needs of that community.

There are so many wonderful towns across this nation that are feeling the impact of crime just as much as the large urban city or at least in proportion to what they were used to, and it is so important that we focus our efforts on what we can do across the land. It might be easy to deal with the issues in Portland, where every resource may be more immediately available than a small town across the mountains in the desert of Oregon. But we have got to be able to focus on how we serve as a partnership in partnership with all communities in America.

As we address the topic of violence and enforcement, though, I think it is important if we are to talk about crime prevention that we realize that we have just begun to deal with the problem after we get the person convicted and that it is imperative that in our Federal grants, in everything we do, we try to emphasize not just the sanction, not just the treatment during incarceration but that we emphasize aftercare in the community. It will not work if that person is going back to the apartment over the open-air drug market where they got into trouble in the first place, and the community is not involved in bringing them back with a chance of success. We have got to develop community initiatives and aftercare programs that I think are key to getting people off to a fresh start.

Sometimes, they are going to come back, if they are a teenager who has been in boot camp, and they may have a job skill, but they won't know how to interview. They won't know the importance of getting to work on time. They may not know how to take direction. But if the community joins together, if we work together, we can make a difference.

I have had occasion to reflect a great deal in these last months on where crime and violence in this nation come from. Clearly, one of the places it comes from is the home. Violence is a

learned behavior, and one of the best classrooms for violence in America today is the home. I did a study as a prosecutor in Miami of why people had been murdered in that county for the previous 20 years. Forty percent of the homicides were related to domestic violence. And I established at the time a domestic intervention program. It has been so rewarding to me in the weeks and months that followed that the police and courts and the medical community reacted to this issue and joined together in community initiatives to address it.

But unless we end violence in the home, we are never going to end it in the streets and in the schools of this nation. Where do we start? We start with a court that is oriented to the problem, one court with people trained in domestic violence who know what the community has to offer in terms of resources, courts that can follow the case and appreciate the issue and understand the need for continuing supervision and understand the need for aftercare if imprisonment is involved; courts that can do more than just adjudicate and sentence, courts that can reach out to the community in appropriate ways and join with emergency room doctors and general practitioners and family doctors in developing an understanding of what can be done to prevent it.

The prosecutors, the courts, the probation officers, the police officers that see these cases can do so much up front if they reach out to the community and let them know what can be done in prevention. Let that family doctor know yes, he can sew up the wound with some stitches, but he knows where that wound came from, and unless he refers his patient for counseling and followup, he is contributing to the problem in the long run.

[Applause.]

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Police officers can make such a difference. It was so exciting to me to see a community initiative we had undertaken in South Dade, where a community-friendly police officer, a public health nurse and a social worker joined together in a public housing project with a high incidence of juvenile crime and other types of crime. After they had been there about 6 months, things began to get a lot better. But their major call for service was family violence: domestic violence between spouses or the problem of the mother who didn't know what to do with the 16-year-old son who was threatening violence.

Just think of what can happen if we develop resources to go with that community police officer and have people trained in providing counseling and intervention; if we can develop programs that provide alternatives. If we look at it from a people point of view and a community point of view, we can make a difference.

Where else does violence come from? Violence comes from the child who is abused. Violence comes from the child who comes to accept that type of violence as a way of life. Again, the community can, if it works together, far better address the issue. Instead of turning away, that community police officer can follow up, because he knows that community. He knows the

people in that community. They trust him. They know that he will do what is right, and he will be able to refer the case.

But then, there may be problems. The police officer may be sure it's child abuse, but the parent may say he fell out of bed. If you're in Portland, you may be able to address that with forensic pediatricians who know what they're doing. But if you're in the town across the mountains down in the desert, and they don't have appropriate forensic resources, how do we respond?

As we address the issue of communities, we have got to realize that the whole information age can give us an expanded sense of community that we have never understood before. Yes, it's better to talk to the doctor in person, but it's far better to get advice on telemedicine than getting no advice at all as to what can be done in a particular situation to diagnose the fracture as abuse as opposed to a fall and to take appropriate action.

As we talk about community, we have got to understand how we can use technology, how we can design transportation to make a difference. Or it may be transportation in an urban area. How many of you live in cities so big that you have heard the doctor say look: I'd be happy to volunteer my services, but she lives two bus rides away from here, and she appears at about half of her appointments, and I have about given up on her. We have got to make sure that we develop networks in our urban areas that can enforce and enhance what we mean by community.

Where else does it come from? It comes clearly from drugs but also from alcohol. And as we talk about the need for substance abuse treatment and prevention and education, we must apply that equally to alcohol.

[Applause.]

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Now, you seem to already understand that. A lot of people don't.

[Laughter.]

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: But if you need some ammunition to convince some state legislators and city commissioners and county commissioners, point out to them that the Centers for Disease Control, in analyzing homicides where young people are victims points out that it's far more often alcohol-induced than drug-induced. We have got to make that message understood. If there is one thing we need to do, it is to focus on the best and the most effective means for treating alcohol abuse, particularly in our teenagers, who become so susceptible to it and who get hit up beside the head so often because they thought one little beer wouldn't hurt.

Let us understand, then, how we work together. Again from a law enforcement perspective, we need to organize with the local police in a partnership to take out the drug dealers, to focus on new problems that are developing, such as methamphetamine. Those of you in the West have seen far more methamphetamine than I hope we will ever see in the East. But we must move quickly to see the warnings from the West and work together to develop education and prevention programs throughout this country that let people know how violence-inciting and dangerous this substance is. If we work together, if we share our information, if we show patterns beginning to move eastward, we can be far more effective in what we are trying to do.

But let us again understand that drug treatment isn't going to work if we send somebody off to a nice substance abuse facility for 5 weeks and then send them home without aftercare, without support, without followup. Look at what a community can do if they really put their heads together. First of all, people are beginning to believe in treatment. When I talked about treatment 10 years ago, people would say Janet, you know it doesn't work.

Now, I believe there is an American today who doesn't know somebody, either family member, neighbor, friend or fellow employee who isn't recovering and who hasn't benefitted from substance abuse treatment, and we have got to enhance that message again and again. But that treatment won't work without a network of support to enable that person to work through it after they come to the community. And it's community again: it's the church reaching out; it's a 24-hour drop-in service; it's somebody to call; it's a mentor; it's a person who can make a difference, and it sometimes doesn't cost any money.

Every time we start worrying about dollar signs instead of looking at the problem and saying let's see what we can do without the resources we have, we get in trouble. And what you all do here and what you all have done in this conference in terms of seeing okay, let's see what we can do with the money we have, we can really then begin to make a difference.

There are so many resources out there, and if we get them linked, get aftercare linked with good, solid drug treatment, we can make a difference. But we are just going to waste dollars in drug treatment unless we develop aftercare programs in the community that can make a difference.

One of the big problems, though, in terms of drug treatment is that the need for it exists so often with parents, with small children: young mothers, fallen into the drug problem, living in public housing, wanting treatment but afraid if they go for treatment, they're going to lose their children. And so, they mask it; they turn away; they refuse it; they deny it.

Just think of what we could do if we identified parents in need of treatment and developed residential programs, even in public housing, that can make treatment a reality, a reality that doesn't mean losing your children. Some are going away to prison, being second- and third-

time offenders. One of the most remarkable programs I have seen is in a New York State prison facility which has a nursery in the prison, child development experts teaching mothers who, as they explain to me, had never known how to raise children before, how to do it, and as importantly, providing a transition back to the community that enabled them to carry on once they got back to the community without the support.

Where else does violence come from? I hope that you will not ignore what I think may be one of our serious concerns for the future--it has been for me--and those of you with significant elderly populations in our community must address the issue of violence against the elderly in family situations. As we increase our life expectancies, as people become overwhelmed by the duties and responsibilities of life, we see more of this. Let us work with the medical community to address this issue. Don't think it is something that just happens upon occasion. It happens too often, and we cannot allow it.

Where else does violence come from? Violence comes from that lady who is trying to raise four children and do her level best. She hasn't gotten child support for 3 weeks. She is at her wit's end. She doesn't know how she is going to pay the rent. She calls the state attorney in Dade County on a Sunday night and screams at her because she hasn't gotten her child support.

We have got to make that a priority. But for too many judges, child support is something that they would prefer to give to a special master rather than provide real focus on it so that that mother can get the resources she needs to keep that apartment, to keep from being out on the streets, to keep a strong and positive environment for her children.

Just think of what we can do if we create a court system for a neighborhood that focuses on drug treatment and provides the supervision and the followup that's necessary; that focuses on child support and knows that lady and knows just how important that child support is for her. Just think of what we can do if we focus on people and what the justice system means to people.

What the justice system means in dealing with a landlord: so many people are simply frustrated. They don't know where to turn. Legal Services is being reduced. They don't know who to go to if they can't get the landlord to fix the plumbing after 2 months, and they get frustrated, and they get upset, and the world starts to fall apart on them, as the whole apartment becomes a more dangerous environment for their children.

We lawyers ought to be able to develop a capacity for that lady to get into court without a lot of bother and without a lot of lawyers.

[Laughter and applause.]

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: My dream is of the court just down in the neighborhood, where they don't have to take two buses away, and where the judges know people in the community, and where she can go in, and she can say Your Honor, he hasn't fixed my plumbing, and it's leaking, and it's unsanitary, and it's wrong, and he makes the man fix the plumbing. It sounds simple; it is. It's called justice, and it's called justice focused on what people need.

Where else does it come from? Where a lot of violence is coming from today is a juvenile justice system that is overwhelmed, overcrowded and asked to do the impossible with totally inadequate resources. All of us have got to make sure that we structure a justice system where the judges work together with people who have caseloads that they can manage, where judges in the neighborhood can work together with probation officers to make a difference.

I have had a chance to talk to people who are working on such efforts. In Boston, you have a probation officer working with a police officer to follow kids after they have finished with the court system to make sure that they are complying with the conditions of probation and that they are given opportunities and appropriate support whenever necessary. It goes back to people, so that the police officer, the probation officer, know that kid. He's not just a number; he's not just a name. He's not somebody that they dimly remember. They know him. And he knows that they know him and that they appreciate him; that they want him to do right and that he can make a difference. It's getting back to people; it's getting back to simple justice.

Where do we begin? I remember all my readings in law school of how the jury system got started, and what I imagine is somebody said that's my cow, and the other person said no, it's my cow. Or they got into a fight: he hit me first; no, he hit me first. And they figured out now, how do we solve this problem? And I imagine somebody who is respected in the community came up and said okay, one, two, three, four, five six; you sit down over there; let's listen to it. You tell your side of the story; you tell your side of the story, and the six came up with justice better than the king and the tyrants have before or since.

But justice has gotten too remote from our people. Justice is sometimes too remote because it is a police officer who drives by in a car that is covering a whole city rather than a community police officer who works in one neighborhood, who is known by the people in that neighborhood and who can make a difference. Justice is a judge 25 miles away downtown who doesn't know boo about the public housing project 25 miles away, doesn't know the people, doesn't know this kid deserves a second chance or doesn't know that this kid has had it and should go into secure detention.

I first began to understand what could be done if we had a judge who knew the community when the community police officer said he had gotten fed up and all the neighbors had gotten fed up with the judge's continuing to release kids. So, he rented a bus, put all the residents on

the bus and took them to juvenile court. The judge got the message.

[Laughter.]