

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

SEARCH INTERNATIONAL

NATIONAL CONSORTIUM ON STRATEGIES AND STATISTICS

GRAND HYATT

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ROOM CONSTITUTION B

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HON. JANET RENO, UNITED STATES ATTORNEY GENERAL

P R O C E E D I N G S

(Introduction.)

(Applause.)

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: My thanks to you all. It is an extraordinary honor for me, and particularly, Mr. Hawkins, to have you here when I receive it for I have admired the work that you do so very much.

The award really goes however, to some really wonderful and dedicated people in the Department of Justice. I couldn't begin to do it by myself. I wouldn't understand it all.

And I just want to recognize so many different people in the Office of Justice programs, in the Department, in the Justice Management Division, the FBI.

They're some really extraordinarily dedicated people, and one of my missions while I'm Attorney General and when I leave the office is to let the american people know how many wonderfully dedicated people work with them and for them in the Department of Justice.

One of those people is Nancy Gist, and I thank you, Nancy, for your leadership at BJA, and for all that you're doing to really advance us into the next century in terms of criminal justice

technologies and criminal justice initiatives.

I have admired SEARCH from afar and then I have seen your work up close. I'm gratified by the contributions of the National Technical Assistance and Training Program.

In addition to this symposium, the SEARCH program has proved invaluable, provided invaluable training in technical assistance to so many justice agencies across the country.

And I can tell you from firsthand experience how valuable such training can be. As a state attorney trying to start the first steps of an information system, I know how difficult it is. You start, you test, you back up, you think that you haven't done it right, you start over again.

And to have an organization such as SEARCH with the answers, so that you don't make the same mistake twice, can be invaluable.

The program is another example of how partnerships, here a partnership between BJA and SEARCH, can yield dramatic results.

I'd also like to recognize the critical role played by SEARCH on so many important national programs and initiatives, the Compact, the INSHIP Program, the Global Justice Information Network.

Ken, under your leadership, under the effort -- pursuant to the efforts of so many people, this has been invaluable and the guidance on the development and the implementation of NIBERS, you're giving me credit; I should just give the credit to all of you.

I came to Washington wondering what it would be like after having served as State Attorney in Miami for 15 years. You get to know your public defender, your courts, your correctional system, and you come into a whole new world of multiple correction systems, hundreds of police agencies, many different courts.

The principles are the same: How do we work together? How do we cooperate together on matters of judicial administration? And there are so many ways that we can do that. That partnership is absolutely essential.

And Nancy told me as I came in today of the number of teams that are here today. For prosecutors, public defenders, judges, correctional officials and law enforcement officials to be here together as teams is just an extraordinary step, and I commend you.

We have an opportunity when people come together in that fashion to really make a difference.

The United States Violent Crime Rate fell almost seven percent in 1997. It's fallen more than 21 percent since 1993. Violent crime rates are at their lowest since 1973 when the Bureau of Justice Statistics began its National Crime Victimization survey.

These are exciting numbers, but I know full well from my experience that there's a tendency in America to say crime's down, everything's okay, become complacent, and the crime rate starts back up or a new insidious substance such as crack comes on the scene or some other force is brought to bear.

We cannot become complacent, and SEARCH and all that it stands for can lead the way in keeping the pressure on, because if we use the precious information that is available to us now through modern technology, if we use it in partnership, if we use it to make the system work better, if we use it to make the system more effective and responsive, if we use and pool information to solve crimes and to effect appropriate sentences, we can have a dramatic impact on the culture of violence in this country.

For five years Toronto had about 100 gun homicides from about 1993 to 1998. Chicago, a city of similar size had some 3,000 gun homicides in the same period.

We do not have to be violent in this country. And with the spirit in this room, the cooperation in this room, the emphasis on fact, on information, on what is happening we can truly, truly, make a difference.

I urge you to continue at your efforts, renew your efforts, for indeed they can make a difference.

And one of your efforts, along with that of Senator DeWine (phonetic) and Senator Layhee (phonetic) has been enactment of the legislation in the area of information collection and sharing.

This is an excellent example. With the technologies that we are building in this world, why do we have to have 50 different or a federal and state? Can't we share some of these technologies in an appropriate way to avoid duplication, to avoid fragmentation, and to avoid the cost that is inherent in these technologies.

Dwight Eisenhower, as he left office, gave a wonderful farewell address that has been obscured in history, but I commend it to you all. He warned of the industrial military complex and the influence that it would have on America for a long time to come.

We have got to work with those that produce technologies to make sure that the industrial law enforcement complex, correctional complex works together, not to raise costs, not to require that we purchase a new piece of equipment every year because the old one has become

immediately obsolete, but that we use our precious resources as wisely as we can to develop the best technology that works.

And so this effort, I think, can be so very important. The President in his budget for the FY2000 included \$350,000,000 to help state and local law enforcement agencies tap into these new technologies.

The program includes \$50,000,000 under the Crime Identification Technology Act itself. Using this money states will be able to upgrade their criminal history and criminal justice record systems and integrate federal, state, and local information systems to name just a few of the possible purposes.

The President's program also contains an additional \$20 million for the Criminal Justice Information Network initiative. And again I thank you for what you have done to promote this initiative.

Of course, there's the remaining \$280 million for a new crime analysis program, improvement of public safety communication technologies, and promotion of other high-tech crime-solving technologies.

Standing alone, the Crime Identification Technology Act would have been a tremendous victory for SEARCH and for the American people, but good things come in bunches and so we also welcome with open arms the Compact.

I need not sing the praises of the Compact to you all. With the passage of it, though, we can all look forward to a newly-efficient and sensible interstate exchange of criminal history information for non-criminal justice purposes.

With the help of the Compact, the American people will have greater assurance that our school bus drivers, our child care providers and our nursing home employees, to name just a few, are right for their jobs, right for our children and right for our parents.

As we move into the 21st Century, information-sharing and technology are more, more than ever the bywords of law enforcement success. I'd like to highlight a few areas where together we are making a difference.

As you know, on November the 30th, 1998, the National Instant Check System replaced the interim system under the Brady Act. NICS has been a tremendous success.

And again we look at technology as if it's something magical. To go to Clarkesburg to watch that system in action, you're reminded all over again that technology will never work without people behind it, people who care, people who are well-trained, people who are trained to

prepare for what those wonderful public servants dealt with as they opened NICS just at the beginning of the Christmas season.

It was an extraordinary undertaking, but, again, an example of what we can do if we are committed to making sure that technology serves us, that we are the masters of technology, not that we let it wrap us up and around its little finger. We're going to control it or otherwise we are in trouble.

In the first nine weeks of the NICS operation, the FBI denied over 16,000 prospective gun transfers based on information received from the NICS, and states which are acting as points of contact have denied many other sales.

Also a number of the denials under NICS have resulted in the apprehension of wanted criminals who were seeking to purchase firearms.

Simply stated, these denials and arrests translate into lives saved and less crime.

Of course the backbone of the NICS system is the state's Criminal History Record System. And while the states have made great progress in improving their system, there is more we can and must do, not only to strengthen the NICS, but also to strengthen all of those systems which depend on state criminal history records.

The first summer job I had was in 1956. I worked at the Dade County Sheriff's Office. There were three floors on the top of our old courthouse downtown. The lab was up there. The road patrol was up there. The jail was up there. And now I look at the difference and it staggers the imagination. We had little 3x5 cards and they would call in and all the criminal histories were written on the 3x5 cards.

We've come a long way, but even as I was leaving Dade County, I was still frustrated by the fact that there were criminal history records incomplete in terms of dispositions so that I still knew there were people who were receiving bail, getting out of jail, whereas, if we had had the records completed, we would have been able to, in all probability, detain them.

The completion of these criminal history records is one of the keys to everything that we are doing in law enforcement, and we must continue that effort, and I would appreciate any suggestions you have as to what the Justice Department can do to promote that effort in every way possible.

One clear step is that every state needs to join the Interstate Identification Index or III. State participation in III will improve the quality, the accuracy and the timeliness of shared criminal history information.

I look forward to complete state participation by the year 2000. And again, let me know if you think of anything that we can do to improve this effort.

Since 1994 the Department of Justice has distributed over \$250 million in grants for the purposes of updating criminal history information. More is available. With your help, the INSHIP program has been a success, but we've got a lot more to do.

One area that I think we must focus on and concentrate on and understand what we must do is how do we provide security for the information that we collect on computers?

We now are engaged in an effort through the National Infrastructure Protection Center at the FBI to work with the private sector to develop the capacity to protect our precious infrastructures that are oriented towards the cyber world.

Today transportation, our electrical system, our power system, our National Defense System, our Banking System, so many other systems are tied into automation and into that critical infrastructure based on cyber tools.

We are now building tremendous databases. What would happen if the bad guy, instead of having guns or instead of knowing how to launder money electronically, decides he is going to fuss with the information systems we develop. I don't think we have begun to consider how we protect those systems to insure accuracy.

Ladies and gentlemen, if a 17-year-old hacker can break into sophisticated military networks, think of what he can do to some of our exposed information networks. We must continue to address this and keep one step ahead of the bad guys.

But to do that will require another step that we must consider. As we build information systems, as we develop new technologies, we're going to have to have the people who can operate these systems and understand these systems, and today we are not graduating enough people with literacy in computers and in information technology.

I would like to work with SEARCH to do everything we can through encouragement, through what I hope will be a cyber core to develop a capacity in state, local and federal governments to graduate people and to employ people with the skills necessary to take us into the next century with secure, effective, global information systems.

Information is such a prize. I tease OJP every now and then. I say I used to get your wonderful books; they were stacked with just a lot of information in them. And I would look at it and say, hey, this is great. And then I'd look and it would be three years old; the research would have been done three years before, and by that time the crack epidemic had hit Miami, and the picture was entirely different, and I didn't understand what was going on.

Now, because of the work that you all are doing, the information that we are sharing at every level, federal, regional, state, and local, we are able to exchange information, not just in the operation of the court system, but in the operation of what is happening in your community.

Is it a drug organization? Is it youth violence? Is it a major gang? Who is causing the problem?

Getting that information, developing it, sharing it, making it available to law enforcement throughout the region so that we can plan together is one of the most exciting opportunities that we have in law enforcement.

And as we develop the systems, we've also got to develop systems between law enforcement that permits us to collect appropriate information that does not represent an invasion of privacy, appropriate information that links regions and helps us prioritize our crime initiatives in each community.

This is the dream I have for the Department of Justice, that the U.S. Attorney will call together federal agencies, determine what they perceive to be the crime problem based on solid information developed through sound intelligence analysis.

They will then meet with state and locals, agree on a plan and priority for the crime problems in the particular community, determine who does what based not on principles of turf and credit, but what is in the best interest to the community and what is consistent with the principles of federalism, and then make plans to implement what has been agreed on.

We can make a difference if we use the information, the precious, current, accurate information that we're capable of collecting if we do it the right way.

We're going to have opportunities from the patrol car to the jail to collect information and understand what's happening, to understand immediately who's coming out of prison and who should -- it's just an opportunity that I think 10 years ago I never dreamed it would happen.

You have made these opportunities happen for America. You have engaged in what most people don't think is really that interesting or that important. You have engaged in one of the most important undertakings in the criminal justice system. How we get the right information, use it the right way, in a timely way to truly make a difference for the American people.

I go back to my challenge. We have an opportunity to dramatically impact the culture of violence in this nation. We cannot slow down. We've got to move ahead with all the vigor that SEARCH has demonstrated over its 30 years.

Mr. Hawkins, you started something along time ago and an awful lot of people have been there along the way. Your work has been vitally important. It has made such a difference for this nation. And I for one think you are some of the heroes and heroines of the criminal justice system.

Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I have a question for you, and you may want to give me some answers. If you were the Attorney General of the United States, what would you do to improve our efforts in support of your initiatives?

There are I think some mics, there's a mic back there and back there.

MR. LEWIS: Thank you. My name is Ray Lewis from the Criminal Justice Center at the Minnesota Office of Strategic and Long-Range Planning. I'll repeat a question I asked yesterday, but, based on what I've learned, I think I'm asking a better question.

What advice would you have on responding to the media when they seek to explain the difference between the public expectation of applied criminal justice information and the current state of the uneven quality and completeness?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I would tell them that we are in a state of transition. I would find your own experience with the 3x5 index card, and then show them the latest piece of technology that is available in Minnesota and say we're halfway between all these people 45, 50 and 60 who are just now becoming computer literate who can have 17-year-olds run circles around them.

We're in a state of transition and we're going to look back on law enforcement 20 years from now and say we were able to do all that with as little as we had. I think you explain it in those terms and they understand better.

But I think there are also some really important things. And if we've accomplished anything in these last six years, one of the things that I hope we've tried to accomplish or I know I've tried to accomplish and I think we have, is that crime and criminal justice are not or should not be partisan issues.

Republicans don't like crime and Democrats don't like crime. I came from a jurisdiction where there was total bipartisanship and oftentimes total non-partisanship.

I have been in San Diego, California, with a Republican sheriff, a Republican mayor and the

President of the United States and everybody standing there together talking about what we were doing together to address the issue of crime.

I think that for too long people thought, public officials, policy-setters thought the way you handle the problem was build more jails and add more police.

Forget about judges or prosecutors, and certainly don't add public defenders, although, you can't recognize -- you've got to convince people that the public defender is an essential part of the whole system and you've got to look at the system as a whole.

It was not popular to add technology and make the system more effective or to even update criminal history records manually.

I think we've helped, all of us working together have helped the American people understand that if we can get current information in the most accurate form possible, we're going to make the criminal justice system work better.

MR. LEWIS: I gave the reporter your quote from the 1996 symposium that information is the lifeblood of the criminal justice system. And he started playing that it was a contaminated system, but I think more accurate is the blood bank level varies, and we're trying to recruit more donors.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Perfect.

AUDIENCE SPEAKER: I'm a little nervous, so I apologize for my voice.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Don't be nervous.

AUDIENCE SPEAKER: I didn't think I'd ever be in this position this morning, but I want to thank you for your efforts with the COPS program, especially from the Commonwealth of Virginia.

It's been a tremendous to have neighborhood enforcement officers walking the street and walking the beats.

I work for the probation and parole side of the house, and we have always been walking the streets and walking the beat. What has evolved is a new partnership between probation and parole and neighborhood officers.

And communication has, between enforcement who are looking for offenders, and probation and parole, who know where they are, has been verbally greatly improved.

One of the efforts I'd like to see the Department of Justice think about is an information system that includes probation and parole because we visit these people, we're in their homes, we know where they are.

Do you have any comments regarding that effort?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Yes. Could I first ask what jurisdiction you're from?

AUDIENCE SPEAKER: I am from the State of Virginia, the Commonwealth of Virginia.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: The state as a whole?

AUDIENCE SPEAKER: The State Department of Corrections, that's correct.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: It is so exciting, first of all, to see the partnerships developing between probation officers and police officers. They're riding together in a number of jurisdictions.

It seems to me we've got to do two things, and we're engaged in doing two things in the Department. First of all, when you say communicate together, they're verbally communicating together in a squad car or on the streets as they got to knock on the door of a probationer who is supposed to be home, but the police officer knows he's not.

But with narrow banding because of the sell-off of spectrum space, local law enforcement, corrections and the like, are going to have to do so much to prepare both for the narrow banding and the wireless communication systems, and it's going to cost many jurisdictions a lot of money. We're going to have to figure out how to do it in the wisest way possible and we're engaged in that.

Secondly, let me explore when I get back to the Department, just what we're doing in terms of probation, COPS, because I think that is an excellent idea.

And the other important point is that it's not just enforcement. When the probation officer knocks on the door at 10:05 when he's due in at 10 on his curfew and the police officer's with him, what we find in a number of jurisdictions is that they're getting to know the kid, he's responding to them, and they are becoming his mentors.

AUDIENCE SPEAKER: I'm talking about the adult probation side, but what's also happened is we have been able to notify officers that this is a very violent offender if they go to serve one of our warrants, and they've been able to do safer arrests and they've been able to accompany us into neighborhoods where we need some assistance from law enforcement.

So it's been a wonderful experience. We just are now verbally communicating as opposed to doing it through an automation process.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I mean, just imagine, I alluded to it during my remarks. If we're able to check for offenders coming out of prison, you look at a recidivist and you can see a crime waiting to happen.

If the probation officer or the parole officer with the police officer in that community setting makes a call there can --

AUDIENCE SPEAKER: There's a lot that could be done. We can get them on technical violations as opposed to violations of law.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Let me go back now to one other point, and that is with respect to community policing. We are seeing the development, not of just community policing and as a person points out, a long history of community probation officers, but we're seeing something else.

We're seeing the development of community justice systems, sometimes in urban areas, sometimes in more suburban areas, and how we exchange information in that community setting is also extremely important.

MR. MASIC: Madam Attorney General, Joe Masic from the Tulsa County Sheriff's Office, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

With the advent of private corrections moving toward operating first-line jails, could you address the ability for them to access III and NCIC, being private citizens?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Let me make sure that I've got your name and address, because I frankly have not considered that, and I would like to find out and inform myself more completely on it and get back to you if I may. I have some people in the audience and they can -- oh, right behind you.

MR. MASIC: Thank you very much.

AUDIENCE SPEAKER: Ms. Reno?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Yes.

AUDIENCE SPEAKER: Will you take one more?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Yes, I'll take one more.

AUDIENCE SPEAKER: I hope they don't take me away like they did him.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: He's still back there. I wouldn't let anything happen to him.

AUDIENCE SPEAKER: Hi, Janet, my name's Brett.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Hello, Brett.

AUDIENCE SPEAKER: You may know me as far as all these other people as 000-00-1234 the social security number is becoming such an integral way of locating people.

My question was, and with the power of the social security number, If you were to look deep into your wise crystal ball down the road, do you ever foresee actually a national ID to be given out as well as a national password to protect any of our information?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I don't think so, but I think that the whole issue with respect to privacy is one of the great issues that we're going to have to grapple with, not just in the context of what we're working on here today, but in terms of what the net provides us, the wonderful opportunities but the extraordinary challenges.

It's a possibility. I don't know the answer. My crystal ball gets dim.

Thank you all, and I am very glad that I could be here. And I look forward to seeing you all again soon.

(Whereupon, at approximately 9:05 o'clock, a.m., the conference was concluded.)