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NATIONAL LEADERSHIP SUMMIT

REBUILD AMERICA

PART II: HONORING THE COVENANT

NATIONAL RAINBOW COALITION

CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION FUND

Thursday, June 10, 1993

Washington Hilton Hotel and Towers

Washington, D.C.

SPEAKER: ATTORNEY GENERAL JANET RENO

12:50 p.m.

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1 STATEMENT OF REVEREND JESSE JACKSON

2 Reverend Jackson: Today we are blessed to have with
3 us a rare and exceptional attorney general to bring to
4 this office the credibility to be heard.

5 When an attorney general walks into a given
6 community, or streets, or church, or banquet hall, beyond
7 having the title which comes through politics, that person
8 must have the moral authority. In that person, the word
9 must become flesh.

10 And some of them might say, "Uh-oh, here comes
11 justice. Here comes liberty," because in that person the
12 word has become flesh and dwells among the people.

13 Fortunately, many of us knew Attorney General Reno
14 when she was working in Florida, working on pulling people
15 together and going beyond the ordinary boundaries. She
16 brings to this office that integrity and that credibility
17 and that will to reach out.

18 Today we are blessed to have, to address our
19 Leadership Summit as we proceed to reclaim our children,
20 Attorney General Janet Reno.

21 [Applause.]

22 STATEMENT OF HON. JANET RENO, ATTORNEY GENERAL OF
23 THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

24 Attorney General Reno: Thank you very much. I have
25 a long way to go to embody those words, but I want to walk

1 that way with you and do everything I can to achieve
2 liberty and justice for all in this country.

3 Part of that effort requires a continuing discussion,
4 continuing communication. And I want to address what we
5 can do about our children, about our communities, about
6 our neighborhoods, about making them safe.

7 When my mother raised children, she taught me that it
8 was the single-most difficult job to do. About eight
9 years ago, a friend died, leaving me as the legal guardian
10 of her 15-year-old twins, a boy and a girl. And the girl
11 was in love.

12 And I have discovered that raising children is,
13 indeed, the most difficult thing I know to do. And it
14 takes love and hard work and a lot of luck and
15 intelligence and gumption and caring.

16 What my mother taught me, though, was you have to
17 have punishment when the child does wrong, but fair,
18 reasoned, humane punishment that fits the violation. And
19 if you threaten punishment, you have to carry it out.

20 But punishment by itself will be for naught unless
21 you have a loving, nurturing environment in which the
22 child can grow as a strong, constructive human being.

23 I think we should put aside, as we address the
24 problem of crime and children, put aside partisan
25 politics, put aside extremes, because this is a problem

1 that affects all America.

2 The well-being of our children, the safety of our
3 communities, and if we approach it with common sense just
4 like raising children, if we give it the dedication and
5 the hard work that is necessary, we can make a difference.

6 We have to start at the end of the line and look at
7 the people that hurt our community, that tear it apart,
8 the career criminals. And we have to make sure, quite
9 frankly, that we have enough prison cells to house those
10 people for the length of time the judges are sentencing
11 them.

12 A three-time armed robber who puts a gun up beside an
13 elderly person's head and threatens them again and again
14 -- we have tried; we cannot do anything more. We have to
15 develop alternative sanctions for people who have prior
16 records and have a drug-abuse problem.

17 And we have to do as we did in Dade County with the
18 drug court and provide a carrot-and-stick approach that
19 says, "Look, there is the jail. You can go to the jail.
20 You can get detoxed. You can get stabilized. We can get
21 you out in a residential, non-secure, then into day
22 treatment. We will work with you in job training and
23 placement, condition it on drug testing, and help you get
24 reintegrated into the community, or there is the jail."

25 And for first offenders, we can do exactly as we did

1 with the drug court in Dade County and give them the
2 carrot-and-stick approach again that says, "Here is an
3 opportunity for treatment. Here is an opportunity for job
4 training and placement. Here is an opportunity to get a
5 clean record, or there is prosecution."

6 We can do far more in the juvenile justice system
7 focusing on 16- and 17-year-olds to provide programs that
8 help get them back into the community.

9 If we have a serious juvenile offender, send him off
10 to an appropriate place. Let us assume that it is just
11 the right place.

12 But too often we see the person successfully complete
13 that program, and they are brought back and just dropped
14 off into the community with nothing more, no follow up,
15 right back to where he got into trouble in the first
16 place. We have to understand that we are undoing a lot of
17 time in these children's history.

18 But I suggest to you, as I have consistently
19 suggested for the last number of years, that crime and
20 drugs and youth gangs and this ever-increasing phenomena
21 of youth violence that we are seeing are all symptoms of a
22 deeper problem in society.

23 And that is that for too long now, America has too
24 often forgotten and neglected its children. How do we
25 address that problem? What do we do?

1 I think what has happened in these last several years
2 is that the federal government has said to the states,
3 "Here. It is your responsibility. You, the states, do
4 it."

5 And then the states have turned around, faced with
6 these new dollar burdens, and told the counties, "You do
7 it."

8 And then the counties have told the cities, "You do
9 it."

10 And it is up to communities now. And what the
11 communities have done, with their backs up against the
12 wall, is they have become bold and creative and
13 innovative.

14 Ministers have worked with police officers. Private
15 businessmen have worked with schools, as partners in
16 schools. They have formed networks. They have created a
17 sense of purpose and a sense of being in these
18 neighborhoods that is making a difference.

19 In our community in April, a year ago, before
20 Hurricane Andrew devastated this area, ministers,
21 ministers took the lead in West Perrine, Florida.

22 They said, "We are fed up. We want to help our
23 youngsters, but we want to help our community as well."

24 And they, working with us, helped form a team
25 composed of a community-friendly, highly-respected police

1 officer, a social worker, a public health nurse, and a
2 community organizer.

3 It was the ministers and other leaders in that
4 community that said, "Let us have the team start in the
5 largest public housing development."

6 That team was full-time together, working as a team.
7 And it came back to me.

8 Public health nurses had said, "Thirty years before
9 we used to knock on the door and sit down and have a cup
10 of coffee with a young mother and tell her what raising
11 children was all about. But I am afraid to go behind the
12 door now."

13 They were not afraid any more, because the police
14 officer was with them.

15 And then they knew that we had credibility, because
16 the minister was there saying, "These are people I trust.
17 These are people that can make a difference. These are
18 people that are listening to me because I helped get this
19 program started."

20 Now, it does not have to be that program. It can be
21 another suited to your neighborhood and to your community.
22 But the most important thing is: Washington cannot be
23 telling people what to do, because the people, ultimately,
24 know best and care deeply and want so desperately to be
25 self-sufficient.

1 That team, by the time Hurricane Andrew devastated
2 that community, had so reduced crime, had gotten kids out
3 of the juvenile justice system, and the police were so
4 pleased with it that they wanted to replicate it in other
5 communities.

6 When Andrew hit, that team galvanized together to
7 help that community and others start to pull their lives
8 together again. That is a small example of what ministers
9 and others can do working together.

10 But as we address what communities throughout America
11 can do, working in a partnership with government, not with
12 government telling them what to do, but in a true
13 partnership, I think we have to understand that there is
14 no one spot in a person's life where you are going to
15 change everything.

16 When I took office 15 years ago in Dade County, I
17 said, "I want to focus on the juvenile justice system. I
18 want to get to the causes of crime. I want to make a
19 difference there."

20 And I started looking at a 16- and 17-year-old. He
21 dropped out of school when he was 13, did not know his
22 father. His mother did not pay too much attention to him.
23 She was starting to get into drugs.

24 He drifted. That young man can be saved, but we will
25 never have enough dollars to save everybody if we wait

1 until they are 16 or 17.

2 [Applause.]

3 Attorney General Reno: So then I went and started
4 looking at dropout prevention. And our Dade County grand
5 jury, for which we served as legal adviser, did a study on
6 dropouts.

7 Dropout programs were most aimed at the middle
8 schools, sixth, seventh, eighth grade. Now, there the
9 child that was just about to drop out had already,
10 probably, fallen two grades behind in reading levels.

11 He had been truant regularly since he was eight years
12 old. He did not have much self-respect, because he was
13 not doing well in school. And he was starting to act out
14 to gain attention and respect through other efforts,
15 rather than excelling in school.

16 It was too late to do everything about all the
17 dropouts in the sixth, seventh, and eighth grade. So we
18 started early intervention programs and neighborhood
19 programs.

20 But then the crack epidemic hit Miami -- I think
21 earlier than most places -- in 1985. And I had to try to
22 figure out what to do about the crack babies and about
23 their mothers.

24 I was taken by child development experts,
25 pediatricians, to the neonatal unit at Jackson Memorial

1 Hospital, our great public hospital in Miami. And the
2 doctors taught me something that will be with me forever.

3 They showed me crack babies who had been in their
4 bassinets, not held or talked to except when changed or
5 fed for about six weeks, because it had hit so suddenly.
6 It was just a massive epidemic.

7 And those babies were not beginning to exhibit human
8 response, whereas, across the nursery, there would be a
9 little baby severely deformed through birth defects, who
10 had tubes coming out of everywhere, who was with the --
11 one or the other parent was with that child around the
12 clock.

13 And that child was beginning to respond with smiles
14 and with human responses. And I learned what nurturing
15 and bonding was all about.

16 Then the child development experts took me in tow,
17 and they introduced me to some wonderful people at Jackson
18 that were doing great works. And they taught me that 50
19 percent of all learned human response is learned in the
20 first year of life.

21 I have asked every psychologist and child development
22 expert I can find, and nobody disagrees with that. That
23 is a phenomenal piece of information dictating a lot of
24 what we have to do for the future.

25 Ages of zero to three are the times that the child

1 develops a conscience and learns the concept of reward and
2 punishment. What good is it going to be to threaten
3 punishment down the road if the child has not learned what
4 it is all about?

5 So I reached a conclusion that, as a prosecutor, I
6 had a responsibility for speaking out to let people know
7 that when they did something awful, there was going to be
8 punishment, but it was going to be fair, firm, consistent
9 and carried out, but that I had to do my part in creating
10 that nurturing society for these children in which they
11 could grow as strong, constructive human beings, and that
12 there was not one point along the line where you were
13 going to have the biggest impact; it was the whole line of
14 living and growing.

15 And I decided we needed to develop a national agenda
16 for children. The communities, the ministers, the leaders
17 in the communities, the activists in the neighborhood,
18 that person that could make a difference was as much a
19 part of this team as anybody else.

20 And first of all, we were going to have to make sure
21 that our parents were old enough, wise enough, and
22 financially able enough to take care of their children
23 before they were born.

24 [Applause.]

25 Attorney General Reno: Let me tell you how children

1 feel about this. I tried to speak to a different school
2 in Dade County on the average of once a week.

3 And this was coincidence about a year ago: I was in
4 an inner-city high school in an auditorium that was jammed
5 full. Then the next week was a middle school in another
6 part of the same inner-city.

7 I did child support enforcement in Dade County. And
8 they wrote a rap song about me, and the kids knew the rap
9 song and could sing it as I walked into the auditorium.

10 And after I got through talking about criminal
11 justice, they started talking about child support.

12 "What happens if he doesn't pay? What happens if she
13 wastes the money?"

14 And I answered the questions.

15 In each instance, I said, "But that is not the major
16 concern. The major concern is you do not have children
17 until you are old enough, wise enough, and financially
18 able enough to take care of them."

19 And spontaneously, coincidentally, both auditoriums
20 erupted in loud, cheering, storming, stomping applause.
21 Children want order and structure in their lives so
22 desperately.

23 [Applause.]

24 Attorney General Reno: So I started focusing on what
25 could be done about teen pregnancy. We can do something

1 about it.

2 A young woman who was pregnant for the first time, I
3 asked her what she wants. She wants to get back to
4 school. She wants safe, constructive edu-care that she
5 can provide for her child so she can get back to school.
6 And she wants family planning information.

7 And it is doggone hard to try to get it to her the
8 way things are structured in our communities, but if the
9 communities work together and come together and develop
10 programs, and if the federal government and the state
11 government work together in partnership with the private
12 sector, with religious leaders, with others, we can help
13 develop these programs.

14 I saw in the paper the other day -- and I need to
15 talk to the people, I believe it was in Washington --
16 about fathers who were coming out of jail and prison and
17 had had parenting programs in the jail and how excited
18 they were about coming out. That is the type of program
19 we need.

20 We need to understand that those young men 18 to 30
21 who have two prior records because they had a drug problem
22 when they were 18 and are now drug-free and want to get
23 off on the right foot need a community board to give them
24 the opportunity to get off on the right foot.

25 [Applause.]

1 Attorney General Reno: These young men could be fine
2 parents if we would give them a chance now. And we have
3 to develop a community sense and purpose of how to do it.

4 And that minister who is not going to take any guff
5 from the young man, and who is going to sit there and say,
6 "Yes. I think you can do it. And you had better, sure as
7 shooting, honor what I'm going to do."

8 [Laughter.]

9 [Applause.]

10 Attorney General Reno: All I can say is: The
11 ministers in West Perrine were not going to let any of the
12 people get away with fooling them.

13 We have to make sure -- and you are going to be
14 surprised that there is an attorney general standing up
15 here talking to you about prenatal care, but every
16 pregnant woman in America should have prenatal care.

17 [Applause.]

18 Attorney General Reno: And ministers should be
19 working with others.

20 [Applause.]

21 Attorney General Reno: Now, what does that have to
22 do with saving our children in crime?

23 Every doctor I have talked to says, "If you are going
24 to make any expenditure in medical care, the most
25 formative time you can expend it is for prenatal care."

1 And you have to help me sell this. You care about
2 children from common humanity's sake. What about that
3 person across town that does not care about children, just
4 cares about his or her tax-paying dollars?

5 For every \$1 you spend in prenatal care, you have to
6 help me spread the message that we can save \$3 for health
7 care costs associated with low birth weights. We have to
8 put the message so everybody understands. Then we have to
9 look at our young children.

10 Something is terribly wrong with the nation that says
11 to a person 70 years of age, "You can have an operation
12 that extends your life expectancy by three years," but
13 says to a child of a working, poor person who has no
14 health care benefits but makes too much money to be
15 eligible for Medicaid, "You cannot have decent, sound
16 preventative medical care that will save that child
17 problems for the future and save the taxpayers' dollars."

18 We have to make sure that all of our children have
19 immunizations. In the communities where there have been
20 good immunization programs, you can see the difference in
21 measles epidemics, and other epidemics that spread through
22 a community, that can be prevented.

23 And we have to put it in -- if we cannot convince
24 people based on common humanity, we have to convince them
25 based on a businesslike approach to this whole issue. We

1 are talking about dollars and cents.

2 An elderly person will say, "Look. I have done my
3 duty by children. I sent my son to college. I helped
4 send my grandson to college. I have done my duty."

5 That elderly person has to be -- has to understand
6 that unless we make an investment in children today, the
7 Counsel for Economic Development estimates we will not
8 have a work force with the skills that can fill the jobs,
9 that can maintain America as a first-rate nation.

10 We are talking about business. We are talking about
11 economics. We are talking about America as a whole. We
12 have to make sure that every child has safe, constructive,
13 what I call edu-care.

14 It is frustrating to walk into a community and have a
15 head start program, a school, pre-school program here, and
16 another non-program over here. We have to understand that
17 families have too often fallen away from our children.

18 And as we have focused on K through twelve, we have
19 to focus on zero to five to make sure that all children
20 have appropriate edu-care.

21 [Applause.]

22 Attorney General Reno: Now, the businessman will
23 say, "Well, that is the family's responsibility."

24 If I walk through a public housing development and
25 see a three-year-old wandering around, I used to -- I was

1 confused.

2 I would say, "Well, where is his mother? Why isn't
3 he in child care?"

4 "Well, his mother, we do not know quite where she is,
5 but she is not looking for work. She is not working. And
6 she has not abused him and neglected him bad enough to
7 make him and her eligible for the child care program we
8 have."

9 Somehow or another we have to put it in business
10 terms so that we can sell our program to the world, that
11 this is an investment in America's future.

12 When we get into the public schools, we have to start
13 looking at conflict resolution programs. I suspect that
14 throughout this nation in every elementary school, you
15 will find good programs where teachers are teaching
16 children to peacefully resolve their conflicts without
17 violence.

18 We have taught them an awful lot about drug usage.
19 We can do the same with violence.

20 When that child is first truant when he is eight
21 years old, that is the time when we should be making an
22 impact.

23 Ministers should be joining together with community
24 police, with principals, and saying, "We are going to have
25 a program. And the police are going to pick up every

1 little eight-year-old, who is truant, and are going to take
2 him to the school. The school is going to call home."

3 Do you know what happens now? The school calls home.
4 Mother may come get him. If Mother does not come and get
5 him, the school puts him on the bus and sends him home
6 without following up to find out what happened. That is
7 just a problem waiting to happen right there.

8 Ministers, social workers, and others should make a
9 home visit to find out why she did not come pick up the
10 child, to find out what the problem is, develop intensive
11 family intervention programs to help that family get off
12 to the right foot, because one thing is for sure: A
13 strong family is the best protector of the child, the best
14 deliverer of social service.

15 [Applause.]

16 Attorney General Reno: But look what we do in our
17 world: We wait until it is too late. We have this lady;
18 she is a good mother. She has three children. She has
19 reached the end of her line.

20 One child has a temperature of 102. She just does
21 not know whether the rent is going to get paid. She is
22 about to lose her job, because she has been so home so
23 often with the child.

24 She is just at wit's end. And one night, she just
25 lashes out at that child who has been crying all night

1 long.

2 And then the social workers come, and the children
3 are taken off to foster care. And that family
4 disintegrates around those three children.

5 We could have prevented that. That lady is not a bad
6 lady. She did not intend to really hurt her child from
7 any malicious sense. She just lost it.

8 If we had had neighborhood programs that provided
9 drop-in service, respite care, some support for this lady,
10 she could have made a difference and continued as a
11 strong, loving, caring parent.

12 If we had had a place where she could leave her child
13 and know that medical problems would be fully attended to
14 while she worked at her work place, we could have kept a
15 strong, healthy family together.

16 We can do so much if we make an investment up front.
17 We have to look at what happens after school and in the
18 evenings when we have children who are in our public
19 schools.

20 The Carnegie Foundation has come up with a remarkable
21 report on the risk and opportunities after school and in
22 the evenings.

23 Think of what ministers working with community
24 leaders and principals could do, and not just for sports.
25 We always tend to think that that is the only thing that

1 can engage our children after school and in the evenings.

2 But there are some that are the greatest computer
3 wizards that I have every seen, that if you opened up the
4 schools to them and let them have access to the computers,
5 they would have a field day.

6 Others want to engage in art. Others want to dance.
7 Others want to read. Others want to do so many different
8 things. We could make such a difference.

9 We have to free our teachers' time to teach by
10 providing support programs for our schools. The question
11 comes up: Where does the money come from?

12 I am not sure that we are going to solve our problem
13 with monies for the future. We are going to solve our
14 problem by people caring and working together and using
15 the limited resources we have as wisely as we know how.

16 It is going to mean the community working and caring
17 and building and going beyond, taking the team we started
18 in West Perrine and expanding it each year by three blocks
19 and then three blocks until one team dominoes into the
20 other, or one church dominoes into the other, and
21 restitching the fabric of neighborhoods back together
22 again.

23 And then we would talk about jobs. Look at what we
24 do with jobs now.

25 We tell a child, "Okay. You are 15. You can get a

1 summer job."

2 And there he is scraping paint on a curb. That is
3 not teaching him a life skill. That is not teaching him a
4 skill that can enable him to earn a living wage.

5 But why do we not look at it from another point of
6 view and say to that seventh grader, "Look. We have done
7 a proper evaluation of your aptitude and interest. We
8 have this summer job opportunity with this private sector
9 employer. We have this after-school work experience
10 program. And we can blend this together so, by work
11 experience and school experience, you are going to
12 graduate from high school if you follow this track with a
13 skill that can enable you to earn a living wage"?

14 Now, the child chipping the paint off the curb does
15 not see a future. The child flipping hamburgers does not
16 understand the relevance. If we blend these together,
17 giving that child a full educational experience, we can
18 make such a difference.

19 Ladies and gentlemen, this is our future. We can
20 make a difference, but the most important thing to
21 remember is that it is not dollars and programs. It is
22 parents caring.

23 I remember my afternoons after school and during the
24 summer. My mother worked in the home. My father worked
25 downtown. My mother taught us to appreciate music, to

1 love her poets, to bake a cake, to play baseball.

2 She spanked the living daylights out of us, and she
3 loved us with all of her heart. And there is no child
4 care in the world that will ever be a substitute for what
5 that lady was in our lives.

6 And I look at parents struggling now to get to work,
7 getting breakfast on the table. They get home through
8 rush hour. They get the children fed, then bathed, and
9 the homework done.

10 And on Saturdays, they run errands. And on Sundays,
11 they go to church. And on Sunday night, they start all
12 over again. And there is no quality time with their
13 children.

14 Somehow or another all of us throughout America are
15 going to have to devise ways to put the family and
16 children first.

17 For if we do not, we will have to harken to the last
18 two verses from the Old Testament, from the book of
19 Malachi, "And behold, I shall send you the Prophet Elijah
20 before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the
21 Lord. And he shall return the heart of the father to the
22 children and the children's hearts to their father, lest I
23 come down and smite the earth with a curse."

24 [Applause.]

25 [Whereupon, at 1:20 p.m., the presentation of

1 Attorney General Reno was concluded.]
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