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THE MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR  
FEDERAL HOLIDAY COMMISSION

ANNUAL RECOGNITION LUNCHEON

Monday, January 10, 1994

SPEAKER THE HONORABLE JANET RENO, U. S. ATTORNEY GENERAL

Room 345  
Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, D.C.

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(1:14 p.m.)

MS. RENO: Thank you, Mrs. Farris

Mrs. King, it is a great honor and a real privilege to be here today. To sit and talk with you and to think a year ago that I would ever have this opportunity is really very, very special for me.

All my adult life Martin Luther King has been the conscience of the America. He has been an advocate for the people of America, not just for black people, but for all Americans. He believed in people, in people who were different and people who were together, but he believed in the essence and the goodness of people, and he believed that they could be nonviolent, that they could live together in peace, that they could value and appreciate each other's differences while reveling and just wondering at the splendor of the commonness of humanity.

I think it is very important, as we consider this holiday, that we give real meaning to it. Mrs. King, for the past five years, my mother and I walked the length of the Martin Luther King Parade. We were the only ones besides the bands and the children who did it. She was not able to do it in the last year of year life.

But I used to watch the people as I walked by,

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1 and I got strength from that parade to go back and do a  
2 better job of child support enforcement, to do a better  
3 job of child protection, to do a better job of trying to  
4 prosecute fairly the people who hurt others.

5 It is even more meaningful for me today that I  
6 urge all America to honor and cherish the memory of Martin  
7 Luther King, Jr , but to do more than that because he  
8 would want us to do more than that, not just to honor, not  
9 just to remember, but to put into action what he believed  
10 in, to trust the people, to believe in people, to care for  
11 people, and to believe with all our heart and soul that  
12 the different, magnificent, wonderful people of America  
13 can come together in peace and harmony.

14 It is important that we make sure that our laws  
15 are enforced, that our civil rights laws are enforced as  
16 vigorously as possible, but what good is an equal  
17 opportunity to education if a 13-year old is cut down dead  
18 in the streets? What good is equal housing and an  
19 opportunity to go out and buy a house and to get credit so  
20 that you can buy a house if you do not get the education,  
21 if you do not get the foundation that gives you the  
22 opportunity to get the job to make the money to buy the  
23 house?

24 As I look at violence in America over the  
25 perspective of 15 years as a prosecutor in Dade County and

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1 now as Attorney General for almost a year, we can do  
2 something about violence in America, and we should  
3 dedicate ourselves here today and everyone throughout  
4 America during the King holiday to dedicate themselves to  
5 doing something about violence. We can make sure that we  
6 give our best efforts to enforcing the laws, to making  
7 sure that people are prosecuted, but that they are  
8 prosecuted fairly so that there is justice in this  
9 prosecution. We can make sure that after we prosecute and  
10 see someone sentenced, that we devise the right sentence  
11 that will enable people who are coming back to the  
12 community to come back with job training and placement,  
13 with drug treatment, with the resources needed to get off  
14 on the right foot.

15 We must join together in getting health care  
16 passed so that our children can grow as strong,  
17 constructive human beings, that we get appropriate child  
18 care programs passed so that our children are properly  
19 supervised, that we support educational excellence  
20 throughout America, that we give our children an  
21 opportunity to learn skills that can enable them to earn a  
22 living wage and have a future and an opportunity.

23 But laws and programs will not make any  
24 difference if we do not reach out and care. In community  
25 after community, I have seen so many almost magical

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1 examples of how people can reach out and care for somebody  
2 else and make a difference in their lives.

3           One of my favorite stories is of Leroy Collins  
4 who has told of the time he went to a youth detention  
5 facility. There was sweet potato pie for dessert. He  
6 commented that it was the best sweet potato pie that he  
7 had ever had and he would like to meet the person who had  
8 made it. The supervisors of the detention facility said  
9 that they did not think so because it was their biggest  
10 trouble-maker. He happened to be a good cook, but he was  
11 the most recalcitrant child in the whole facility  
12 Collins insisted as Governor that he was going to meet  
13 this young man and he did. Some years later he heard that  
14 the young man was a success as a businessman in Miami,  
15 that he was honored by the Chamber of Commerce. When  
16 asked what had given him this opportunity, he said the  
17 Governor of Florida said something nice about my sweet  
18 potato pie.

19           Other people say, well, I cannot help because I  
20 am too old. I cannot reach out and help others. I cannot  
21 care because I am too old. Once I was at a meeting and an  
22 84-year old man stood up and said, do you know what I do  
23 three hours a morning for three days a week? No, sir. Do  
24 you know how old I am? I am 84 and I go three mornings a  
25 week to a public school and volunteer as a teacher's aid,

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1 and a teacher stood up beside him and she said I am the  
2 first grade teacher for whom he volunteers. The gifted  
3 children cannot wait for their time with him because he  
4 challenges them far beyond my poor powers, and the  
5 children with learning disabilities cannot wait because he  
6 has the patience of Job and he has increased their reading  
7 level beyond anything that I could do.

8           Each of us can make a difference. That 14-year  
9 old who becomes a tutor for the elementary school next to  
10 the middle school can make such an incredible difference  
11 serving as a role model for that youngster and making a  
12 difference. The businessman who comes out on Saturdays to  
13 Anacostia again and again and again to work in a church  
14 and to give youngsters an opportunity can make a  
15 difference.

16           We got to this point of violence and drugs and  
17 particularly the terrible phenomena of youth violence, of  
18 teen pregnancy, of dropouts, teen suicide because for too  
19 long now America has forgotten and neglected its children  
20 and its families. It is time to come together as one  
21 great nation and in the memory and in honor of Martin  
22 Luther King reach out and care for all the people of  
23 America.

24           (Applause.)

25           (Whereupon, at 1:21 p.m., the speech was

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