

1 REMARKS BY
2 THE HONORABLE JANET RENO,
3 ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES,
4 TO THE NATIONAL CONSENSUS BUILDING CONFERENCE
5 ON SCHOOL-LINKED INTEGRATED SERVICE SYSTEMS
6 - - -
7 NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION
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9
10 Monday, January 24, 1994
11 National Education
12 Association Building
13 1201 Sixteenth St., N.W.
14 Washington, D.C.
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P R O C E E D I N G S

(8:40 a.m.)

GENERAL RENO: It's a privilege for me to be here with you today because it is your colleagues in Florida that have brought me to the point that I am at.

I'd like to share with you how I got to where I am, what I think needs to be done, and how we can do it together. I took office as the chief prosecutor in Dade County in 1978, motivated then only by a mother who had been a feature writer for the Miami News and had done stories on the juvenile justice system and how abysmal it was.

With that motivation in mind, I swore I was going to focus on our juvenile division and do everything I could to make it a model division. But it didn't take me long to realize as I looked at presentence investigations that if I waited until a child was 17 or 18 and we were really beginning to focus on him, we would never have enough dollars to change all the children's lives at that age if we waited that long.

So we started looking at causal connections and saw the direct relationship between dropouts and delinquency. And through our Dade County grand jury back in the early eighties we did an extensive study on dropout prevention that the school system even published and

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1 circulated around the State.

2 But it became clear to me as I talked to
3 educators, and it was so interesting to watch educators
4 teaching the prosecutor, that if we waited until middle
5 school, if we waited until 10 or 11 or 12 to start doing
6 something about dropout prevention, that that was too
7 late.

8 Already we saw children who'd fallen behind two
9 grade levels, who had lost self-esteem because people
10 thought they were dumb, and who were beginning to act out
11 in other ways to attract attention and to make themselves
12 the center of all the focus.

13 So we started in about 1985 an early
14 intervention neighborhood program focused around the Head
15 Start years. We had some minimal success and perhaps
16 would have had more. But it was at that point that the
17 crack epidemic hit Miami, earlier than most places in the
18 Nation, about 1985. And doctors took me to Jackson
19 Memorial Hospital, our large public hospital,
20 obstetricians, pediatricians, child development experts,
21 and took me to the neonatal unit and showed me in very
22 human terms what nurturing and bonding were all about.

23 I'd always heard these as concepts, but it's
24 nothing like looking at a baby who's been in a bassinet
25 for six weeks because there's nowhere to take the baby

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1 because the mother is a crack addict and the place is
2 overwhelmed with crack-involved children, to see a child
3 who had not been held or talked to except when changed or
4 fed for six weeks, and then look across the nursery to the
5 child born with severe complications, with tubes coming
6 out of everywhere, but with parents around that child
7 around the clock, and you began to understand what the
8 difference was.

9 The one child was beginning to respond almost
10 like a little animal, the other child was beginning to
11 respond with brightness and laughter amid the pain.

12 Then the doctors took me by the hand and started
13 educating me about child development, again in very human
14 terms, pointing out to me that 50 percent of all learned
15 human response was learned in the first year of life, that
16 the concept of reward and punishment and the conscience is
17 developed during the first three years.

18 Most prosecutors never hear that, but it's
19 imperative that we do hear it, because what good is all
20 the prisons, all the prison cells we ever construct, going
21 to be 18 years from now if the child is indifferent to
22 punishment or doesn't understand it or doesn't have a
23 conscience?

24 Then I looked at that whole sweep of time of
25 zero to 18 years and I began to see what we had done. We

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1 all get on our white horses. The juvenile court judge
2 gets on his white horse and gallops off to tilt with
3 windmill after windmill, and does a wonderful job and
4 designs wonderful programs. But what good is that going
5 to do if he doesn't get a child that can be molded through
6 programs except at inordinate cost that we will never be
7 able to afford?

8 And I see dedicated first and second grade
9 teachers trying their level best and doing remarkable jobs
10 against overwhelming adversity. But what good are their
11 efforts going to have if that child walks out into the
12 streets as he leaves school and into the darkness and
13 despair that too often our streets bring to our children?

14 And I realized that we each focused on our own
15 little world, without looking at a continuum, without
16 looking at the whole picture, and that we each focused on
17 our own little world without becoming an advocate for the
18 child and the child's family as a whole, and without
19 selling it to people in ways that they could understand.

20 About then the Council for Economic Development
21 came out with its wonderful book called Children In Need,
22 and I suddenly found my book for the chamber of commerce
23 and the business people. So I could go to them and say:
24 Look, I as a prosecutor won't be able to build enough
25 prisons 18 years from now unless we make an investment in

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1 children, and you won't have a work force with the skills
2 necessary to fill the jobs to maintain America and your
3 company as first rate.

4 We all have a responsibility to speak out beyond
5 our narrow disciplines and look at the whole picture. But
6 we also have a responsibility to get out of our jargon and
7 start putting it into terms that people can understand.
8 I've got to stop talking legalese and child development
9 people have got to stop talking psychological terms to
10 chamber of commerce executives, and we've got to put it in
11 human terms so that they understand.

12 Then I had perhaps one of the greatest occasions
13 of my life to see something that was extraordinary. The
14 Governor of Florida about three years ago asked me to
15 serve as chair of a social service task force to make
16 recommendations as to how to revise the delivery of social
17 services in Florida, for he had heard me speak and thought
18 that it might be well for a prosecutor who couldn't be
19 condemned as a bleeding heart, except by Senator Phil
20 Gramm, go look at the picture and make some
21 recommendations.

22 Our task force held nine public hearings from
23 Pensacola to Miami by way of Delglade. The typical
24 hearing went from 9:00 o'clock in the morning until 10:00
25 o'clock at night. In Miami I went to the bathroom once

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1 and ate dinner at the podium, and heard ten-minute after
2 ten-minute presentation by some of the most eloquent
3 individuals that I have ever heard, by people themselves,
4 by people in trouble, by caregivers, by government
5 workers, by private not for profit workers, by just some
6 incredible heros and heroines who put it on the line like
7 it should be and gave me a far better understanding of how
8 we can link social services together.

9 The important feature is to trust people, to
10 believe in people, to believe in them and trust them
11 enough to hold them accountable, but to understand that to
12 hold them accountable we must give them the building
13 blocks to develop a human ability to be accountable.

14 How do we do that? One of the first things that
15 we do is stop waiting for the crisis to occur and start
16 developing prevention programs. America has spent so long
17 now saying we'll wait to build the prisons, we'll wait to
18 provide the costly tertiary treatment, we'll wait until
19 our companies can't find qualified workers before we start
20 responding with remedial programs that are far more costly
21 than if we had made a small expenditure up front that
22 would enable a parent to be self-sufficient.

23 The second thing I think we have learned is that
24 the best caregiver of all is a strong family, and as we
25 look at a child, we've got to look at the child as part of

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1 the family.

2 And the third thing that we've learned is that
3 when we talk about prevention we have got to begin at the
4 beginning. But how do we do that, because we've all gone
5 down our little pig trails?

6 I think one of the first steps that I hope you
7 all will undertake as part of this conference is to
8 encourage the centers of higher education and education
9 throughout this country to start designing their graduate
10 schools so that they interrelate to other graduate
11 schools. It was very frustrating for me to see the law
12 school go in one direction, the medical school at the
13 University of Miami going the other direction. But then
14 they started to come together and every time they
15 collaborated in course work or otherwise there was
16 success.

17 I think we've got to understand that we need a
18 community advocate, a person who can cut across lines, who
19 can give people advice on social security law and AFDC and
20 other arcane Federal regulations and know what they're
21 talking about. They don't have to be high-powered
22 lawyers, but they've got to understand the tools that are
23 needed by citizens in the community to begin to get ahead.

24 , Lawyers probably have failed most miserably,
25 because 80 percent of the working poor and the poor in

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1 America do not have access to legal services. So that's
2 one of the reasons I advocate a new concept of community
3 advocate, trained in the rudiments of law that affect
4 those in poverty, trained in other disciplines, that can
5 provide a licensed community advocate that can help people
6 become self-sufficient, because they desperately,
7 desperately want to.

8 And over the years I have taken my knowledge to
9 the streets of Dade County, to Miami, to a community I
10 love, and I have watched us fragment ourselves. I've sat
11 around a table as the Federal Government comes to town,
12 sometimes three or four agencies at a time. They don't
13 talk to each other, they don't know how their programs
14 relate to each other, and they tell us what to do --
15 Washington thinking it knows better than Miami what
16 Miami's problems are.

17 Then I've watched my own community get
18 fragmented, with teachers going in one direction,
19 prosecutors in another, social workers in another. But
20 suddenly they're beginning to come together.

21 The time has come for us to form partnerships.
22 To that end I came to Washington saying. Okay, kid, the
23 buck stops with you now; you can't complain about the feds
24 any more, you is the feds.

25 And I went to the Secretary of Health and Human

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1 Services, to the Department of Education, to HUD, to
2 Labor, and with the Department of Justice, and said: Let
3 us form a partnership. And my dream is that a city such
4 as Miami would be able to call its number in Washington
5 and, instead of having five separate agencies with five
6 separate sections within the five separate agencies
7 respond, have a Miami desk or a Baltimore desk or a Los
8 Angeles desk where communities could work through the
9 problems of Washington through one central point that
10 understood what resources would be available.

11 We need to join together to make sure that
12 Congress gives us the flexibility to meet community needs.
13 It is so frustrating to turn around and see a program
14 earmarked for a special effort that is probably obsolete
15 by now. Far better that communities working together come
16 up with the plan.

17 But the big challenge is going to be for the
18 communities to cut across the lines of diversity that make
19 us so great, but cause us to squabble, to cut across the
20 lines of disciplines, to bring communities together in one
21 sound plan that addresses the life of children and their
22 families as a whole, and then with the community saying,
23 this is what we need, these are our needs and resources,
24 we've got a strong private not-for-profit group that
25 addresses this issue, but we need some money for this

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1 piece of our plan, could you do this, could Justice and
2 Education come together to provide us something in terms
3 of conflict resolution, because we don't need the grant
4 the way you framed it, but we could use it in a slightly
5 different way to far better effect.

6 We've got to stop tying communities' hands with
7 conditions and terms and processes and mechanics and start
8 saying: Look, you set the outcome measurements that you
9 want and we're going to hold you to it. Then as a
10 partnership, with the Federal Government working with
11 States and local government, I think we have got to
12 address what I have called that national agenda.

13 When we look at community plans and award
14 moneys, we've got to not dictate what should be in that
15 agenda, but there has got to be an approach to the agenda
16 as a whole.

17 First part of it is to make sure that parents
18 are old enough, wise enough, and financially able enough
19 to take care of their children. We have got to do
20 something about teen pregnancy in America. If we can send
21 men to the moon, if we can do all the things that we've
22 done, we can begin to address this problem.

23 So often, it is the people served that we've got
24 to listen to. I developed a program for teen mothers in
25 Miami and what frustrated me most was the three things

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1 they wanted. They wanted to get back to school, they
2 wanted child care so they could get back to school and
3 pursue the future that had been briefly interrupted, and
4 they wanted family planning information. Trying to get
5 that as part of a coordinated package was so doggone
6 difficult, but it makes such a difference.

7 We have got to make sure that parents have the
8 skills. Public health nurses told me in the hearings that
9 we held around Florida. 30 years ago, Janet, I used to go
10 sit in the kitchen and talk to somebody about the formula
11 for the child and what was necessary and how to take care
12 of the infant and how to bond, I'm afraid to go now. So
13 we developed a team composed of a community-friendly,
14 highly respected police officer, a public health nurse,
15 and a social worker, that went to the family as a whole.

16 We've got to make sure that we have a child
17 support system that works around this Nation. We've got
18 to make sure that we do everything possible to implement
19 the family leave policy, the first piece of legislation
20 signed by this new administration. We've got to make sure
21 that workplaces come into the twenty-first century using
22 the technology of today in America so that we design our
23 workplaces so that families are put first. And we have
24 got to do everything we can to make sure that parents
25 understand how important it is to be with their children.

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1 Next we've got to explain to everybody that will
2 listen to us -- and those that won't listen to us, we've
3 got to figure out how we can make them listen to us --
4 about how important prenatal care is. In this richest
5 nation in the world, to have parents who are going without
6 prenatal care is a travesty.

7 And if you can't persuade them from common good
8 sense, put it to their pocketbooks and explain to them
9 that for every dollar invested in prenatal care you'll
10 save three dollars down the road in health care costs
11 associated with low birth weights. Get them one way and
12 if you can't get them one way get them another.

13 We've got to do everything we can to make sure
14 that health care reform is a reality. Each of us has
15 particular interests. We cannot let our particular
16 interests dilute our effort to get health care reform in
17 America that provides preventative medical care for all
18 our children and their families, that provides current
19 immunizations.

20 It is a travesty in a Nation where a 70-year-
21 old person can get an operation that extends their life
22 expectancy by three years and yet a child who is a child
23 of a working poor person who makes too much money to be
24 eligible for Medicaid but doesn't have health care
25 benefits can't get preventative medical care.

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1 And we've got to link the services together so
2 we get those services to them. Too often we found when
3 our team went to a home that there was a mother sitting
4 there, disenfranchised, afraid, alienated from the
5 community, but when that team came in suddenly she began
6 to think that people might believe in her. And when that
7 team provided transportation across town to a clinic that
8 could deal with her child's complicated problem, she began
9 to believe that something might work.

10 That comes back again. You can't have
11 integrated services unless we address the transportation
12 problems. Yes, you can provide integrated services in a
13 school, but until you address the problem of referrals and
14 how you refer somebody to that counselor who is willing to
15 provide pro bono services, but lives two buses away, we're
16 not going to solve the problem.

17 We have got to change the focus of our school
18 system to recognize that zero to three, zero to five, is
19 the most formative time in a person's life, and that in
20 too many instances now families have just fallen away from
21 that child. For the family that cannot provide proper
22 care and supervision, there has got to be an immediate and
23 automatic, sound, solid educare component built into our
24 systems of education in this country.

25 But then we've got to focus on our schools. I

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1 still hear from my elementary school teachers. They've
2 written me telling me how proud they were of me and they
3 remind me of some of the things that I did wrong in
4 elementary school. But they were so much a part and
5 parcel of my life and I remember them so vividly, and I
6 can name all their names. And I want the children of
7 America to have an opportunity at education like I had.

8 But look at the burdens we place on teachers.
9 The most unprecedented educational challenge in all of
10 human history is we have had the greatest burst of human
11 knowledge in these last 100 years and yet they have been
12 the agency most responsible for absorbing the social
13 burdens placed on society today by families that are
14 falling apart.

15 If we do nothing else, we have got to say to
16 this Nation. Something's wrong with a nation that pays
17 its football players in the six figures and pays its
18 school teachers in too many States in this Nation what we
19 do.

20 But we have got to look beyond the 9:00 to 3:00
21 or the 9:00 to 2:00. We have got to look into the
22 afternoons and into the evenings, when too many children
23 are simply adrift.

24 When I go to a community I like to talk to kids
25 in detention, to ex-gang members, to kids who have been in

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1 trouble, to ask them what could have been done to prevent
2 it. And the common theme again and again wherever I go in
3 this country, large and small cities, East and West, is if
4 I had had somebody to talk to, somebody who understood
5 what it was like to try to grow up, and something to do,
6 something to be involved in afternoons and in the evenings
7 that was positive, that was interesting; I'm not an
8 athlete, I couldn't really participate in sports; if I had
9 had something else that could involve me.

10 These are simple things to do compared to
11 building prisons and trying to straighten out people after
12 they've gotten off on the wrong foot in the first place.
13 But we've got to do everything we can in terms of looking
14 at the early signs.

15 I don't know about your jurisdiction, but in
16 mine we saw all the signs a kid truant 15 days in the
17 first 45 when he's in the third grade, nobody does
18 anything about it, police pick up a child at nine or ten,
19 take him to the school, school calls home, mother doesn't
20 come to get the child, school sends child home on the bus,
21 nobody follows up.

22 If there had been somebody knocking at the door,
23 a team of police and social worker and public health
24 nurse, you might have found a 25-year-old mother who had
25 had that baby, now nine, at 16, who was beginning to slip

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1 into the abyss of crack addiction, and we might have been
2 able to pull her back.

3 Or if we had had earlier signs with better
4 outreach of public health, we could have pulled her back a
5 lot quicker at a lot less cost.

6 We wait until the crisis occurs. We've got to
7 put the initiative up front. And one of those initiatives
8 is in the whole concept of public health, of public health
9 nurses going to the streets, going to the streets with
10 community-friendly, highly respected police officers,
11 creating a safe space, creating an intervention that is
12 friendly and not threatening.

13 And in some instances they are going to find
14 that mother who has succumbed to crack addiction. You
15 offer her treatment. She's going to be worried that she
16 loses those children, and you will not be able to provide
17 her treatment unless you can provide circumstances where
18 her children can be with her.

19 That bonding is so strong, it is so wonderful,
20 it is so magnificent. And there are examples where
21 programs are working to provide just that. In New York
22 State, the State prison system provides a nursery and a
23 toddler program within the prison whereas those mothers
24 who are now second and third time offenders tell me: For
25 the first time I understand what it's like to raise

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1 children, for the first time I think I can be a good
2 mother, I have lost children on the outside, I have a
3 chance of doing it right now.

4 But it's disciplines crossing together. But one
5 of the major problems that I've already alluded to is the
6 whole issue of safety on our streets and in our schools.
7 It is imperative that we do everything we can to support
8 Secretary Riley's efforts in terms of the Safe Schools Act
9 and to get community policing to the streets in ways that
10 can involve the community in identifying problems, where
11 community and police come together to trust each other,
12 where our streets can be made safe so that you can engage
13 in the collaborative and integrated efforts that are so
14 important.

15 But what keeps our efforts too often from
16 bearing fruition is that we end up doing them in concrete
17 block structures, in neighborhood resource centers, that
18 become dungeons because we cannot go out into the
19 community and involve others.

20 But as part of the process, one of the most
21 important features -- and I'm not sure how many are
22 represented here today -- we cannot forget what some
23 social worker once told me. The best social service is a
24 good job.

25 Our whole job effort in America has too often

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1 been ill-planned. We take CETA moneys and say to a
2 community: Here's \$3 million worth of CETA moneys, you've
3 got to spend it in six months or you lose it. So all
4 sorts of make-work jobs are put together and kids get jobs
5 for six weeks or six months or a year. That doesn't help
6 anything.

7 What if we develop a system in this country
8 where we take the aptitude and interest test at the time
9 educators tell us that it's optimum for planning, for
10 future planning, and then design with the private sector
11 work experience programs in the afternoons and the
12 evenings and summers that are tied into school classes,
13 and let that child know that if they follow that pattern
14 from the seventh grade to high school graduation they will
15 graduate with a skill that can enable them to earn a
16 living wage.

17 There are a lot of jobs available now for people
18 who have those skills, but too often children are
19 graduating without the skills, without the work
20 experience, without the work ethic that can enable them to
21 get those jobs and keep them. The school to work program
22 can be so important in this effort.

23 The national service program can be so
24 important. But working together, we can make a
25 difference. But what we've got to do is ensure not only

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1 that the Federal government and local government come
2 together as a partner, not just that the Federal
3 government's agencies come together to coordinate, and
4 that you come together as integrated services in the
5 community, but that we keep a watch out for the child and
6 his family as they progress and make sure that there are
7 not large gaping cracks in that continuum that they can
8 fall between.

9 Too often we let those cracks become canyons and
10 become great time spans that permit all your good work
11 early on or later on to be for naught.

12 I have never ever felt so confident as I have
13 since the crack epidemic hit Miami in 1985 that we are at
14 the time of solution, that we can make a difference. But
15 I will tell you that it is the doctors, it is the social
16 workers, it is the teachers, it is the child development
17 experts, it is that community police officer who
18 understands his community, but most of all it is the
19 American people themselves who have made a difference.

20 In those public hearings, the Mental Health
21 Association of Florida organized an effort where mentally
22 ill people testified before us, and they were the most
23 eloquent in terms of explaining what can be done when we
24 bring services together and when we make an investment in
25 people and in their self-sufficiency.

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1 This woman had tried to commit suicide several
2 times. She'd been in and out of institutions. People
3 always waited until the crisis occurred. Finally, one
4 physician working with community groups got her into a
5 program and into community-supported living. They
6 provided respite care, they provided a 24-hour hot line.
7 They understood that it wasn't going to be easy, but she
8 had been well for a very long time.

9 The recovery addict who can testify as to trials
10 and tribulations, but the ultimate continuing success, is
11 the best, best advocate.

12 Working together -- and I join with you in
13 trying to do everything I can to support your efforts -- I
14 think we can make a difference for our children's future
15 in America.

16 (Applause and, at 9:07 a.m., end of speech.)

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