NATIONAL METHAMPHETAMINE CONFERENCE

Omaha, Nebraska

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U.S. Attorney General, Janet Reno

Keynote Address

P R O C E E D I N G S

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Thank you very much, Barry.

One of the finest, most wonderful things has happened to me since I came to Washington is General McCaffery becoming the Drug Czar. He has brought such energy, such common sense, such an ability to get people to do things together, to an issue that needed it so much. And it has just been my great pleasure to have the chance to work with you.

Senator Carrie and Governor Nelson, it's wonderful to be back in Nebraska, my third trip. And again, I come to a state whose leaders are dedicated to trying to do something to address problems up front, early on, before they become too complicated for us to solve without a lot of money, and a lot of tragedy.

And Tom Monaghan, it's been my great privilege and pleasure to have the opportunity to serve with you. You represent what a United States Attorney should be. And I thank you for all you do for the Department of Justice and this nation.

In 1985, we suddenly noticed a significant increase in cases coming into the system in Dade County. We saw an increase in violence. And we did not know what was happening. And then, we began to hear more and more about crack.

But we still didn't know what was happening, what the physiological response

was. We began to learn, but it was too often a slow process. I watched it tear up neighborhoods. I watched it destroy lives. I watched it cause families terrible misery and much tragedy.

I watch the court system become overwhelmed. And so, when I first heard about methamphetamine, and heard what it could do, I said let us try to work together all of us, and come up with something that makes sense.

Tom Constantine, the wonderful administrator of DEA said, let's make sure that we bring the state and locals in, and involve them in this whole process because they're on the front line.

And I, having been a state and local, who never liked the Feds coming to town to tell me what to do, thought that was a wonderful idea. And what we have tried to do is put together a strategy. It's based again on some of the issues that I think are so important.

First of all, if we're ever to address the problem of drugs in America, we must have a partnership first in law enforcement, with the Federal, state, and local law enforcement officers across this country working together; having a two way street that permits the full exchange of information on issues of importance to that community; that permits us to get information from the locals; that permits us to figure out who can handle what case best, and not worry about turf and who gets credit, but worry about who's getting rid of the drugs in that community.

(Applause)

But I've gotten a new perspective, too. I realize it just can't be community by community, when you see something like crack or methamphetamine come across the country. We've got to approach it from a regional perspective as well. And we've got to make sure that we're coordinated in a national sense if we're to do the job.

But key to the partnership is something that Barry McCaffery has eluded to. Police and prison guards are never going to solve the problem of drugs in America, unless we develop an equal, strong, firm partnership with those who deal with treatment, and prevention, and education, and that is an absolute foundation for what we do.

(Applause)

It is so wonderful to stand shoulder to shoulder with a general who will look

anybody in the eye, and tell them unless we address this problem up front early on, it's not going to be any solution. And so, it is extraordinarily important that we look at prevention. But what does prevention mean?

It is so wonderful just to see the list of people in this room. And then, to have a chance to talk briefly with some of you, and see the diverse background from which you've come, people who are interested in children's issues, advocates.

The reason I'm a child advocate, because I've looked at too many presentence investigations of children that I had convicted of armed robbery or drug use. And I had seen points along the way where we could have intervened to have made a difference in that child's life.

I don't care whether it's crack, or methamphetamine, or alcohol, we are going to have to make an investment in our children for all of their lives, if we're ever going to be serious about prevention.

(Applause)

Education, some people talk to me about, well you have to tell young people don't use drugs. Yes, but young people are very smart, and very shrewd, and they want more facts, and better understanding of the issue.

And it has been so revealing to me, and so gratifying to me to see educators, people who know how to communicate with young people, developing the best strategies, the best content, and the best subject matter that can truly educate our young children about what drugs can do, and why we shouldn't use them.

Treatment, it has bothered me for a long time in this country that there be waiting lists for treatment, treatment by people who can not afford it otherwise. When, if somebody had five stiff drinks tonight and took off through town at 60 miles an hour, ran into a car, killed three people, and broke their two arms, their two arms -- the two arms would be set tonight at the public hospital here in Omaha, even if, they didn't have insurance, and even if, they didn't have money.

When people are seeking treatment whether it's for methamphetamine or any other substance abuse, and crying out for it, and wasting away on a waiting list and using again, some how another we have got to develop a capacity to treat people in this country as we treat them for other illnesses.

(Applause)

That is going to require treatment specialists working with everyone else to develop the most cost effective means for doing it. It may not mean long hospitalizations. It may mean drop in centers, and other support mechanisms within the community that are a lot less expensive.

But, we have got to find the best, most cost effective way of doing it. And we have got to educate this nation that if we fail once, it doesn't mean we necessarily give up. If somebody has cancer and has a recurrence, we don't give up. And we've got to learn the same philosophy with respect to treatment, because we can ultimately prevail, if we keep trying in a large number of cases.

But we're still not going to be totally successful. They're still going to be people that break the law and get caught with drugs and get arrested. And it is that arrest that can be so important.

The suddenness of hearing that jail door clang behind you, of seeing that police officer start advising you of your rights, that often precipitates people into treatment. I used to go see some of my, they weren't clients, graduate from addiction treatment programs. And so many of them got there because of an arrest, and because of the fear of what would happen.

And that's how we came to design the drug court. It takes many different forms across this country. It has to be tailored for different substances, meth in one instance, crack in another. But it can be so effective just based on a carrot and stick approach.

And we need to expand the concept of drug court and that carrot and stick approach, not just to the first offender charged with possession of a small amount, but to those who are in prison, and who should be in prison, but are coming out.

And we have got to develop means of saying, you can come out if you get cleaned up, if you work with us in job training and placement, we'll get you out in an ordered graduated way. But, you're going to be supervised. And if you mess up, you're going to be back in, and they're going to be consequences.

If we work this out in a rational way, we're going to be able to reach an awful lot of lives, but we need everybody in this room working as a team to do it throughout this nation.

But then, you're going to have people who deal in methamphetamine and distribute it, and kill people. And these people, the traffickers, the major dealers,

the distributors, should be put in jail for a long, long time. And that's what my business is basically about, in terms of enforcement, and targeting the major distributors, and the people who deal in this misery. And that's what I will talk about tonight.

When I watch the strategy develop what I wanted to hear from were the people in the field. Law enforcement in California had been doing so many good things to address this issue. Then, Tom, and I think representatives from 14 different states, U.S. Attorneys, state and local law enforcement joined together and developed the strategy for the Midwest.

It is an excellent document which talks about what needs to be done. And what does need to be done?

Let us start at the national level. What we need to do is develop and execute, and we're in the process of doing so, a comprehensive national plan for targeting, and prosecuting, and convicting, and getting sentenced to a substantial time in jail, the rogue chemical companies who supply the percussor drugs interstate across this country.

(Applause)

But if you've ever been to a law enforcement meeting where people don't know too much about methamphetamine, you find an awful lot of people that need to know more. And just judging by the comments that I've heard here tonight, this whole conference has been a wonderful opportunity for people to learn about different aspects of the problem.

And it is this type of conference, this type of learning that can make such a difference in the long range solution. It is an essential -- training is essential in almost every aspect of the problem dealing with methamphetamine. We have got to train, first of all, federal prosecutors, who may not know some of the distribution issues involved, who may not know some of the problems; DEA, FBI agents in the peculiar problems of methamphetamine and what is needed to get firmly get at the problem.

But we have to do more. State and local law enforcement are my heroes, quite frankly. They're on the front line on so many different issues. They have one night to catch a robber, and the next night stumble upon a lab, and they don't know what to do. But they're there on the front line protecting us. And we have got to make sure that we provide them with the training they need to do the job.

General McCaffery asked if I would take some questions afterwards. But what I would love to do too, is to hear from you as to what we can be doing better to provide support, training, and assistance for state and local law enforcement, for laboratory assistance, and experts.

What can we do to ensure that we provide the technical expertise necessary to ensure safe resolution of laboratory take downs?

We need to train more state chemists on what to expect in terms of laboratory issues that arise; forensic scientists in what to expect in terms of laboratory issues that arise; forensic scientists in what to expect, and what the issues will be as they get cross examined by the defense attorney.

There are a number of initiatives underway. But whether it be tonight or any other time, I really appreciate the opportunity to know from you, what we can do better with respect to training.

The General is indeed a general. And I'm learning a lot from him. But one of the things that I think we share in common is the desire to know, a desire for information, a desire to know who is doing what. And it made me so happy to see representatives of the NDEC (phonetic) here, to see attention being paid to the necessity for developing a good solid, intelligence base of history, of current information.

So, that on a nationwide basis we can focus on the priorities, agree on priorities and work together across the country; federal, state and local prosecutors to take down organizations in a sensible way.

(Applause)

We have got to make sure, and the Administrator has been told that if he needs more resources, I've got to try to find them for him. That when state and local law enforcement doesn't have the capacity to take down a lab, or is unfamiliar with the problem or if it's a small jurisdiction that has never had the problem before, that DEA will have the resources necessary to respond.

That's a big order. But it's something that we've got to be able to provide. And we're going to do everything that we can to do so. If we're having problems along those lines, I want to hear about it. It's wonderful to come out, and away from Washington and listen to what's going on. And I go back with get back lists that are wonderful basis for action.

Even after we deal with the national issues, what we're seeing are so many regional problems, regional problems that are unique to one area.

And so, what you have done, Tom, in the Midwest; what has been done in a number of areas with U.S. Attorneys, state and local law enforcement taking the lead, has been so effective in the development of these regional strategies.

And it's wonderful to read the reports of some of these meetings, of agents, detectives, prosecutors getting together. Is this the best way to prosecute? Is this the statute that should be used? How do we handle this problem?

The more we can help to facilitate at the federal level, local discussion that deals with the issue that local law enforcement must confront everyday that must be confronted on a regional level, we want to do it. We want to be your partner. We don't want the credit. We just want to do everything we can to support you in getting the job done.

But, we still need to look at what is necessary in legislation. Prosecutors across the country as they came back to us with respect to recommendations as to what was necessary urged increased sentences for methamphetamine and for the chemical traffickers, with large fines to be imposed to those who knowingly sell chemicals to traffickers, and further heighten regulatory controls.

Congress, last August, passed the Comprehensive Methamphetamine Control Act of 1996. It included some of our suggestions and some novel ideas. It directed the U.S. Sentencing Commission to increase the penalties for trafficking in methamphetamine, and it's percussor chemicals. And to consider higher penalties for clandestine lab operators who mishandle ignitable, corrosive, and toxic chemicals, so as to pose a risk to public safety, and to the environment.

The sentencing guidelines actually issued do not go quite as far as we might like, but they will result in higher penalties. And I think they will make a difference. But again, I think it is important that we work together to develop any additional legislation that is necessary.

The agents who've been on the front line, the prosecutors who've had to handle these cases, if there is corrective action that needs to be taken, let's work together to come up with legislation that can make a difference.

Yes, General, I majored in chemistry. But I still can't pronounce all the names. And the regulatory aspects of our strategy seem to me to be arcane some of the time. But they are among the most important, and effective tools we have.

Because methamphetamine must be sensitized from percussor chemicals, regulatory control of a select group of chemicals pose great promise in curving the clandestine manufacturer.

The law passed last October will tighten controls by limiting retail sales of drug products containing key percussor chemicals such as ephedrine, and pseudoephedrine. The regulatory aspects of the law don't become effective until this October.

Proposed DEA regulations will soon be ready for publication for comment. We'll need to gage the impact of the new law, and particular where the law is regulatory exemption for pseudoephedrine tablets sold in blister packs is effective, or if it's being exploited by the traffickers. We need to make sure we hear from everyone across this country as to how we develop the most effective regulations possible.

And obviously, since we deal with many problems that effect Mexico as well, the General and I have worked together. We had an excellent visit to Mexico. We had an excellent exchange. I had one of the best meetings I've had with the Attorney General of Mexico, who is very sensitive to these issues, very forth right, and trying very hard. We are making progress. We have a long way to go together, but, I think we're on the way.

What are the successes?

Jeremy Travis can share his latest figures with us. And we can think, maybe we're having some success. Maybe, we deserve a pat on the back. But then someone says, maybe it's amphetamine that's being used now. Let's find out. Let's understand better. Let's approach it from a scientific point of view.

Let's not guess. Let's get the solid information that we need to make the best judgment. If there are less emergency room admissions in the latest figures, maybe it's because it's become more of a rural problem, and we're not seeing it yet, because they don't get to the hospital.

I don't know the answers. But I do know, if we take the knowledge in this room, both from treatment professionals, those specializing in prevention, and those specializing in the law enforcement side of it, and use that knowledge, and the best research we can come up with.

If we work together as partners, and do the job based not on credit, but what is in the best interest of this nation, I think we can prevent happening what

happened with crack. I think instead of seeing neighborhood and neighborhood, and then, community and community brought to its knees by a terrible substance, we can look back and say law enforcement and prevention came together as they for too long must and should have. And we have licked the problem.

To all of you in this room, all I can say is thank you, you all, for your dedication to this issue, and for all that you do for your communities, but little lower than the angels. Thank you, very much.

(Whereupon, the keynote address by Attorney General Janet Reno was concluded.)

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