



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE  
ADDRESS OF THE HONORABLE JANET RENO  
TO THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF  
DRUG COURT PROFESSIONALS

999 9th Street, Northwest

Washington, D.C.

Thursday, June 4, 1998

P R O C E E D I N G S

MS. RENO: Thank you so much and,

Senators, thank you. Thank you for your

friendship from the beginning; thank you for

your leadership. Ladies and gentlemen, for

people to come back year after year to care  
as much as the senator cares, to constantly  
be looking for new and better ways to do  
things is an example of public service at its  
best; at its real best. You're wonderful.

Lauri had told me that drug courts  
were expanding. Other people said there  
would be 2,000 people here, but you don't  
know what it's like to think back to 1989 and  
to walk in and see this. It's really  
something.

We started in Dade County and

there's another person who has, year in and

year out, listened to people try to "b.s."

him, try to con him. He knows when to give

them a pat on the back. He knows when to

talk to them with a figurative kick in the

backside. Happy birthday, Stanley. I love

you very much. It's his birthday.

Then, if anybody thinks that we'll lose momentum, all they have to do is watch Judge Jeff in action. I appreciate your inviting me here today. I appreciate the first time you came to visit me, and I just appreciate more than I can tell you all that you've done to ensure the enormous growth of the drug court community and the vision and the energy and the caring that you've brought with it. Thank you.

Let's look at the numbers, Senator.

Two years ago when I spoke to you all here in Washington, there were approximately 80 drug courts in operation. Today, there are 275 with more than 150 in the planning stage.

Two years ago, there were only a few juvenile drug courts. Today, there are 44 juvenile drug courts and 6 family drug courts with 58 more in the planning stages, and this is an example of something we can

do.

We can get the best of treatment,  
working with others who care in comprehensive  
community initiatives that begin to reweave  
the fabric of community around our children  
at-risk.

All the treatment specialists tell  
me that treating a juvenile is one of the  
most difficult things in the world, and I  
know. About 12 years ago, I became the legal

guardian of 15 year old twins, a boy and a girl. The girl was in love, and I've learned an awful lot about raising adolescents. It takes hard work, love, and an awful lot of luck. One day, they are three. The next day, they are 13. The next day, they are 30, and some days they are all three wrapped into one, and they don't know what they are.

They bounce around and they never, ever hit rock bottom. But with all that we

have learned about drug treatment, surely we  
  
can learn the best techniques for treating  
  
juveniles, both drug-abusing juveniles and  
  
alcohol-abusing juveniles. This should be  
  
one of our great challenges for the remainder  
  
of this century.

Two years ago, there were no drug  
  
courts in tribal country. Today, there are  
  
three operational Native American drug courts



and at least 20 more in the planning stages,  
and they recognize how important it is to  
focus on alcohol, as well.

When I came to Washington, I left  
so many wonderful people in South Florida.  
Among them were the Michasoochi Indians. I  
came wondering how I would deal with my  
responsibilities in the Department of Justice  
with Indian tribes across this land.

I have been so heartened by their

strength, by their traditions, by their  
culture, by their reference to sentencing  
circles, but one of them standing up at  
Harvard Law School and telling me, your  
system just provides blame; it casts blame.

It says they are guilty; they are not guilty,  
but you don't do anything about the cause of  
the problem. You don't do anything to heal.  
You don't do anything to bring peace. I

said, let's try drug courts.

We can make a difference in Indian Country. It is the fastest growing juvenile population in the country today. There are so many wonderful traditions that we can help maintain and restore if we focus, as well, on Indian Country, and make sure that no American is left out in the opportunity that drug courts can give people for a new life.

The real beauty of drug courts is

that this common sense concept has emerged

because people like you use common sense, use

caring, and use an awful lot of hard work.

Drug courts are not a federal

initiative. They are not a Dade County

initiative. They are an initiative of every

single one of you in this room who, by

caring, has made the difference.

Yes, the senator's right. Thanks

to him, and nobody else, we have seen a large increase in federal support. Two years ago when I spoke to you, we did not know what the final appropriation for the Drug Court Grant Program would be. It turned out to be \$15 million in 1996.

Today, the appropriation for the grant program has doubled to \$30 million. With that appropriation, we have been able to support more local initiatives through direct

program support and through more technical assistance and training. In fiscal year '98, the Office of Justice Programs awarded 80 planning grants, 80 implementation grants, 20 enhancement grants, and 3 cooperative agreements to provide technical assistance and training to the field.

There are now operational drug courts in 42 states, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia with drug courts being planned in six more states.

Two years ago, we had some evaluation that told Stanley and myself that Dade County could work better. Today, there are new positive evaluations being reported on drug courts all over the country. Just recently, the Portland, Oregon Drug Court released an evaluation with very positive results. The evaluation showed that program

graduates had 76 percent fewer total

subsequent arrests than the comparison group

over a two-year period.

This is really good news, and it's

an example again, if we do it right, if we

build it the right way, it's going to work.

But it's going to be based on common sense

and caring. This year, the National

Institute of Justice awarded grants to study

and evaluate four of the oldest drug courts

and will very soon award another grant to



begin another national evaluation of 14 drug  
courts.

Something has happened in this

nation and the Senator's right, there is a  
political quality to our drug debate. But in  
so many instances across this country, if I  
walk into a community, I'll find a Democratic  
United States attorney, a Republican district

attorney, a Republican mayor, a Democratic  
senator, police chiefs who are non-partisan,  
and all in it looking at what works, what  
doesn't work.

They have forgotten political  
partisan labels to anything, and they are  
just getting the job done in their community.

They are aided and abetted by  
having sound, scientific research done on  
what works and what doesn't work, not  
research that gets out to them five years

later when it's pass and obsolete and of no  
use, but current research that can be used to  
go to a county commission, to go to the state  
legislature and to go to senators and  
congressmen and say, this works; look at the  
return we can get on our dollars.

I think the American people want to  
believe with all their heart that

treatment works. I think that almost every American I know has a friend, a family member, a neighbor, a co-worker who is recovering. We have got to get that message to every political forum in the world in scientific terms that can convince people and anecdotes that can convince people and real-life examples that can convince.

But we've got to be careful. The worst thing we can do is spread ourselves too thin.

The judge and I would occasionally try to do that, and there'd be one person that's saying, no, I'm not going to do it. We'd get serious and I'd come upstairs and I'd think about it and scratch my head and I'd say, yes, May was right; we can't spread ourselves too thin. We have got to make sure that drug courts do not become the dumping ground of court systems that are absolutely

overwhelmed. It is not a good investment of our dollars.

If we invest wisely, if we build carefully, we can make a tremendous difference. We want to continue to ensure that drug courts meet the needs of each and every person that comes into the program. So very important is the impact that drug courts have had on families and in communities. Sixty-four percent of drug court participants

are parents of minor children.

More than 2,400 parents regained custody of their children as a result of their successful participation in the drug court program.

It is so wonderful to know that all of these children are benefiting from having drug-free parents and from the new-life skills their parents are learning through substance abuse treatment. But I still

detect something that I saw in Miami again

and again; a lady knew she had a problem, but

she was terrified that if she went into

treatment, she would lose her children and

she could never get them back again.

One of the most rewarding things

I've witnessed in the five years I've been

Attorney General is to visit a prison in

Upstate New York, walk into the prison cell,



bed here, bed here, bassinet here, bassinet  
here, walk into one of the nicest nurseries  
that I have seen with child development  
experts.

Let us be creative and think about  
what we can do to let parents know that they  
don't have to lose their children, that they  
can learn together to be better parents, and  
that we can maintain the family through the  
drug court program in ever increasing

numbers.

It's important because there have been more than 525 drug-free babies born to drug court participants. This statistic is not only important to the families who have the healthy baby, but it's important to the community if we're ever going to do anything that will provide a lasting solution to crime.

You've got so many wonderful,  
wonderful reasons to be so proud of what  
you're doing. I am so proud of you.

The carrot and stick approach, the  
effective use of the coercive car of the  
system coupled with treatment, coupled with  
encouragement, coupled with that pat on the  
back is being used as a model for other types  
of courts; for domestic violence courts, gun  
courts, and others.

All over the country, we're seeing  
  
a tremendous growing interest in community  
  
courts, courts that are problem-solvers that  
  
use the problem-solving approach that look at  
  
the whole person, look at the whole community  
  
and deal with the underlying problems that  
  
cause the crime in the first place; courts  
  
that involve members of the community in

bring together a community police officer  
who's dedicated and caring and a community  
probation officer to work together as a team.

We can make such a difference if we  
remember that public specialists can be a key  
member of the team, along with other social  
service agencies that have so much to offer.

Everybody says, but we don't have money.

We're delivering services, though. Let

us take the services we deliver and let us

make sure we coordinate them in the wisest way possible to avoid fragmentation, to get the best return on our dollar. It's happening.

You, in the drug courts community, were the first to be bold enough to rethink traditional roles, reaching outside the walls of the adversarial process to work together to solve the problems of substance abuse and crime. It's becoming a part of the other courts' ways of doing business, rather than

just some new idea of a few.

When we consider that more than 70 percent of the offenders in most court systems have drug or alcohol problems, it just makes good sense to take the drug court approach to managing these offenders and reallocating court and treatment resources to solve these addiction problems.

Now, Senator, I don't often like to disagree with you, but I am anyway. If we use the common sense approach, if we remember that we're focusing on non-violent first-offenders in some categories and juveniles in others, there are a whole lot of people in our prisons that have substantial drug abuse problems that are not getting treated, or if they are getting treated, they are taken from the prison, dumped back into the apartment over the open-air drug market



where they got into trouble in the first

place. Guess what's happening?

Now one of the most expensive parts

of drug treatment often is that facility

where you can treat them. We've got some

ready-made facilities.

We've got some opportunities with

people who are in for three years or five

years to develop the same approach coming out, the same carrot and stick approach that says, you want to work with us in terms of job training in the prison; you want to work with us in terms of returning to the community, you're going to be under the supervision of a judge who makes a difference and who can pop you in or pop you out, depending on how you want to work with the judge.

We can do so much if we use the

resources that we have. Ladies and gentlemen, if we're going to develop sound solutions to the drug problem, we are going to have to recognize that the key to the solution is aftercare, aftercare that is supervised by a judge who cares and knows

when to impose sanctions and when to give the good pat on the back.

I have been Attorney General for a little over five years. I have had an opportunity to visit so many communities across this nation. Never have I believed so deeply in the American people's resiliency, strength, and ability to solve problems.

I can remember in 1983 as the crack epidemic hit Miami, I thought, whoa. I felt like I had been kicked in the stomach. You try so hard and then there is a new

You remember that in 1989 a couple  
of people got together to form a drug court,  
and then you look at today. You look at 1989  
and the crime rate in this nation, and you  
look today at the crime rate down six years  
in a row.

There is no one particular reason for it,

but there is one overall reason; people like you

who care, who are willing to put common sense  
tools to work and who, ladies and gentlemen,  
have proven in the last 10 years can make  
a tremendous, wonderful difference for this  
country. Thank you for all that you do.

(Whereupon, at 2:00 p.m., the

PROCEEDINGS were adjourned.)