



MEMORIAL INSTITUTE FOR THE PREVENTION  
OF TERRORISM AND VIOLENCE

"HOW TERRORISM AFFECTS OUR FREEDOM"

KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY U.S. ATTORNEY GENERAL JANET RENO

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

OKLAHOMA CITY, OKLAHOMA.

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ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Thank you so much, Mr. Johnson. Thank you for helping lead the way to make this possible, Secretary Cheney, everyone who has been involved, I thank you for this remarkable opportunity that all America will have to make sure that freedom is not affected by terrorism.

But as Mr. Johnson just made clear, this city, its people, victims and survivors are clear examples of a message that in this country, with the American people reacting as you have reacted over these last three-and-a-half years, terrorism will not affect our freedom.

What you have done in these three-and-a-half years has been remarkable. As Mr. Johnson has pointed out, we are gathered in a rebuilt and restored church to talk about our future and the effect of terrorism.

This is an appropriate place to speak of such things. This house of worship was damaged, but not destroyed. It has been repaired and

renewed. It stands as a symbol of determination, this community's determination, its people's determination, stands as a symbol of the spirit of the city, state and country, it stands as physical proof that while a bomb might create unspeakable pain and grief, we will never allow a terrorist to destroy our ideals, our institution or our spirit.

It could have been a different message. People could have fled from this church and left it and gone some place else throwing up their hands, but not the people of this church, not the people of Oklahoma City. You have stood your ground and said, "We will not let terrorism affect our freedoms."

(Applause.)

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: This is a day of sadness, but it is a day of wonder. We mourn and we remember with painful clarity how much we have lost, but today is also a day of hope and affirmation. It is a day when we join together to speak of the challenges that face us as a nation in the aftermath of this evil. It is a day that symbolizes America, America that can take hurt and then stand up and move forward and look to the future and learn from it.

It was through you that we, as a people, experience the horror of this crime. It was through you that we witnessed the triumph of the human spirit. It is through you that I daily, every day that I'm in my office, am reminded of what happened for there is the picture of a child almost one years old, who is not with us anymore.

And Jacie is a memory to me that we can never give up, we can never sacrifice anything that this nation holds dear, because she, who never knew and who could never develop dreams, she is an example of why we can't give up and give into terrorism and let our freedoms be sacrificed.

(Applause.)

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: When we thought that badness might prevail, when we looked at the images on CNN and could not believe what we saw, it was you in the Sunday service that followed, that reminded us that courage and determination and love can never fail. It is a lesson we will always remember.

If the people of Oklahoma City had not joined together, if you had led your separate ways into your sorrow and grief rather than coming together in the way that you did, we might say that terrorism can affect our freedom, but you have made clear that it will not as long as we rely on people like the people of Oklahoma City.

We saw the tenacity and dedication of local, state and federal law enforcement, those who worked around the clock and uncovered evidence to advance the cause of justice.

I looked at the rubble and thought, how, where do we begin to find the evidence? What are we going to do? We saw how you worked together to put the pieces together. We saw the work that was done by the prosecutors and their staff. You devoted years to building a case to ensure that justice would be done.

We will remember your dedication to the rule of law, but if you had just thrown up your hands and said, this is too large, this is too huge, we cannot solve this crime unless we infringe our constitutional principles which we hold dear, it would be a different matter. That did not occur in Oklahoma City.

Police, prosecutors, piece of rock by piece of rock, evidence by evidence, a phone number here or there, but done according to the constitution, you demonstrated that the rule of law can prevail in the midst of a terrorist attack. We saw the work of victims' advocates who were wonderfully kind and sensitive and supportive to so many. You made sure that victims and their families knew what was happening and what to expect. At a time when everyone was experiencing an emotional turmoil, you were the calm in the storm. We will remember your caring, gentle wonderful concern.

If you had not been there, if the system had not been explained, victims and survivors might have said, "I've had this." You help bring understanding and the wonder of the process to the people who were hurt most, and you helped them understand and become not critics, but constructive participants in a system that stood before two juries and stood before the world and showed that the rule of law can prevail, and that we did not have to infringe upon our constitutional principles.

Oklahoma City has shown, again, that if we stand up for what we

believe in, if we stand up to this nation, if we stand up to the rule of law, we will in the end prevail.

But we have learned from our experiences, and we have more to learn, and I would like to look to the future to see how we can work together to address terrorism, what we can do to prevent it, what we can do to ensure that we limit its damage across this country.

We have much to learn, but in the American spirit, we move ahead to try to do that.

First of all, I remember almost from the outset, stories I heard from the police and fire crews who said that they had to ask young students to act as runners to pass messages from one site to another.

I see similar problems along the borders. Border patrol agents try to communicate with each other. I see inoperability in some instances, but too often people can't communicate with each other in fire and law enforcement. Police departments can't communicate with another small department down the line.

We have begun a major effort. Councilman Schwartz has helped in this effort to ensure that radio frequencies and equipment are available for first responders to communicate with each other. That will be one way we limit harm and grief and damage of terrorism. Now, one of the problems that we face as we protect this nation for the future is that some of these issues are technical, some of these issues require an understanding of the budget process.

We've got to make sure we understand those processes, the -- we understand the technical requirements so that we can be sure that we have a system available to local law enforcement, the first responders, to those engaged in rescue efforts that permits them to communicate safely, securely and in a way that can ensure the safety and security of the people they protect.

We've learned more about what needs to be done, provide help and support to victims, not only on the day of tragedy, but during the weeks and months to follow.

In those first days people were paralyzed. We were focused on saving lives, but there were people whose lives had been torn asunder, and

we were slow in responding.

We have got to make sure that we are organized in every instance of a terrorist attack to respond immediately, sensitively with understanding, and that we galvanize the forces of the community and this nation together to ensure appropriate response. We need to have a two-way network that ensures exchange.

We have got to do everything we can to prevent the problem in the first place. This requires a renewed effort on the part of all law enforcement to build partnerships across this country, a partnership between federal, state and local law enforcement.

It was local law enforcement, a New York -- a Oklahoma City police officer that identified the number that helped us begin the course that solved this case.

It was the state official who spotted Tim McVeigh. It was the FBI who worked with them to build a case. It was state and local and federal prosecutors working together.

We have got to forge that partnership across this country so that we get information up front that can lead to the prevention of these tragedies before they ever occur, but we have got to make sure that we

don't let terrorism infringe upon our freedoms.

We don't need to collect information about innocent conduct and innocent people. We need to collect information that will prevent a crime. That is a careful line to walk, but Oklahoma City is an example that we can walk it and overcome the tragedies of terrorism.

But it will still strike, and it will strike in forms perhaps, God forbid, that we have not seen yet, chemical weapons, biological weapons.

The bombing here made it clear to all of us that when a terrorist act strikes, the first few minutes are critical. The actions taken by the first people on the scene, the local rescue squads, firefighters and police, often literally mean the difference between life and death. We know that these first responders do so much, but they need to be

supported by proper plans, training and equipment to do the job right.

The federal government must be a full partner in this effort, not telling people what to do, but engaging in a two-way dialogue with police and local first responders, emergency room personnel, public health personnel about how we deal with these issues up front, how we plan before it occurs so we know just how to respond to limit the harm and the damage caused.

State and local governments need to be full partners in the planning effort because you have been there. Sometimes it has been a tragedy that does not involve a terrorist attack, but instead has been a force of nature, but the first responders are on the line, and we need for them to be a partner.

Two weeks ago in Washington, I announced the establishment of a new national domestic preparedness office housed in the FBI and staffed in part by individuals from a variety of agencies.

I want this new office to be a center for assistance and solutions and not another federal bureaucracy. I want local officials and state officials to be able to call and get information, get information with respect to training, get information with respect to grants that can provide support for state and local law enforcement.

We must create a two-way street that the federal government providing information and assistance while local law enforcement and fire department and public health organizations receive the training and equipment they need to meet an emergency.

We need to work together to prevent a tragedy before it occurs and to provide the support that is needed if a tragedy strikes.

There is another type of terrorism that we really haven't dealt with because too many of us don't understand it, but today, this nation has an information network that controls some of our most important services, emergency services, power and energy, banking.

So many services including transportation, the traffic lights right outside, phones, we have got to be prepared to protect against that hacker or that terrorist or that person who wants to cause trouble

because of economic competition.

We have got to be prepared to defend against terrorism in a form that we've not seen before, that is to say, the cyber attack.

The FBI has established a national intra-structure protection center that will attempt to do the same thing, but we have got to be prepared, and we cannot say that's somebody else's problem or we'll let somebody else handle it.

As somebody said today, we're all in this together. Because with the information network as it exists in this country today, the public and private sectors are inter-connected as never before.

We will not solve the problem of cyber security, nor will we prevent cyber attacks that can bring a community to its knees unless we form a partnership with the private sector.

This will require new understandings, new appreciations, but it will -- I suggest to you not require changing the constitutional principles that we hold dear or infringing upon our freedom.

Let me simply say what I have said today on many occasions how much I admire, how much you've inspired me. The people of Oklahoma City are an inspiration to this whole nation.

You give us courage, you give us hope, you give us understanding that there is light at the end of the tunnel. You are my heroes and my heartwings, and you will always be my in my heart.

While we come together today for a brief moment, we will always be bound together. We are bound by the memory of the living and the spirit of the dead.

We are bound together by tragedy. We are bound together because we have worked together, and now it is time to work together to take what we have learned from this horrible tragedy and move forward to do everything humanly possible within the bounds of our constitution to prevent such a tragedy for the future, but at the same time be prepared should it happen again.

Freedom is very expensive in terms of human commitment, in terms of

human participation. Freedom is very dear in this city where you have given so much in the cause of freedom.

But this nation is unlike any nation in the history of the world, and it is imperative that we join together to fight the forces of terrorism while at the same time fighting with all our heart and soul to defend freedom that we hold so dear. Thank you for leading the way.

(Applause.)

(Conclusion of speech.)