



**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION  
OF  
DRUG COURT PROFESSIONALS**

**SPEECH GIVEN BY  
ATTORNEY GENERAL**

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**Fountainbleau Hilton**

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**12:00 p.m.**

MS. RENO: Thank you, Noell. And thank you all for such a warm welcome. But I'm the one that should be applauding you for we have come a long way from Judge Goldstein's small courtroom and Judge Klein's conference room to the Fountainbleu Hotel and this many people.

It is an example of what can be done when people care, put aside turf and come together to solve problems. It is an example of what the courts of this nation can do to make a difference and it is so wonderful to see the people of the Florida Supreme Court, the chief justices and Justice Ehrlich. You gave us the authority to move ahead with drug courts. Judge Goldstein has been such a leader. Bennett Brummer and Hugh Rodham were instrumental in making it work as public defenders. For the person who now has the job I

had, who has made a major contribution, Cathy Rundell. But there were so many other people that made a difference. And then there were people who came to talk to us to find out what this drug court is all about. Does it work? And it was all bipartisan. There weren't Republican and Democratic factions. We were all working together to solve a problem and it began to spread.

One of the first people I met was Claire McCaskell who worked at it from a national perspective. I congratulate her. She was elected Missouri state auditor. She was a problem solver and she has succeeded.

One of the second people I met was Jeff Tauber and you have been an absolutely inspired leader of this effort, and I congratulate you.

When I think of what has happened in ten years, I just say it did work. You can make a difference and you can get ideas and see them come to fruition. You can see peoples' lives saved. You can see babies born drug free. You can see people have a new beginning. You can see crime go down. And it is because of the energy and the commitment of the people in this room, and I salute you and say "keep on".

There are now more than 390 operational drugs courts and more than 200 in the planning stages. Even more amazing is the adoption of the drug court philosophy of treatment combined with sanctions and intensive, I call it the good old-fashion carrot and stick, approach to family, juvenile, tribal, domestic violence and mental health courts. And I think it represents a new era for the courts of this nation. If the courts can control the case, if the courts can have the resources to give juvenile delinquents a chance to grow strong in a positive way and impose changes that mean what they say, and if the courts can be assured of a reentry program that gives people an opportunity to come back to the community with a chance of success, courts can make such an extraordinary difference. If courts look at it from a problem solving point of view and a community point of view rather than just legal theories, it can really, truly make a difference, and I think it is a new era in the criminal justice system. A new era also because

we have come to recognize that the criminal justice system, in partners with the public health community, can do so much more together than either can do apart.

Look at what happened. More than 140,000 individuals have enrolled in drug courts around the nation and probably for the first time received real supervision, real treatment, real initiatives that can make a difference in enabling them to become clean and sober. More than 14 states have enacted legislation relating to authorizing or funding drug courts and several more states are on their way in doing so. We are truly moving towards institutionalizing drug courts of this state at the state and local level. Our communities are benefitting. More than 750 babies have been born drug free to drug court participants. This is one of my favorite statistics. We have got to expand because there are too many children still being born ridden with drugs. More than 3,500 parents were able to regain custody of their children as a result of their drug court participation. More than 4,500 parents have become current in child support payments as a result of drug court participation and having had a liaison run by child support collection efforts. I think that's wonderful.

One of the points that was very clear to us all was that we must have an evaluation of the drug court to continually, constantly look at how we could improve it; that we could never let our standards be impaired. Those evaluations have been extraordinarily important and today we know much more about the successful drug courts than we did even last year. Recidivism rates continue to range from two to 20. Recidivism rates from the drug court clearinghouse and American courts are generally well below five percent. We know from last year's Columbia University National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse Study that drug courts provide closer, more comprehensive supervision and much more frequent drug testing and monitoring during the program than other forms of community supervision.

More importantly, drug use and criminal behavior are substantially reduced while offenders are participating in the drug court. These are concrete results. I'm occasionally asked: What is the future of these results?

What is going to happen? Today we are beginning to see more communities serve serious abusing offenders in multiple points along the way in a drug court system that breaks the cycle of substance abuse and crime.

I believe the drug court concept as it is expanded into other areas can be absolutely instrumental in helping this nation end the culture of violence that's plagued it for too long.

I used to wonder what would happen if we started looking at the crime problem in America from a problem solving point of view, coming together in each community, police and schools, and parks and recreation specialists and business people and the medical community. If we can come together, if we can deal with guns as we have dealt with drugs and drug courts, if we can deal with the problems of youth who are unsupervised and alone too often in the afternoons and evenings and none during school hours, if we can come together to focus on the serious organizations and take them out and provide something to fill the vacuum that they have created, we can truly make a difference in this country. We can continue to reduce violence. It has gone down seven years in a row. It doesn't have to go back up if we continue what you're about here today.

But it is imperative, if we are to succeed, for drug courts to reach a broader population and to have an even greater impact on all aspects of our community. Despite all of the successes we have witnessed, we're reaching only a small fraction of the approximate 800,000 arrests that are made for drug possession annually, not to mention particular drug-related offenses and probation violations. The drug court approach can provide the structure to judicially supervise all cases - adults, family and juveniles that cover substance abuse offenders living in the community. We know it works. Your challenge is to apply the model to all offenders who can benefit from it. I think we can make that happen.

The Justice Department and the government, the feds, are really tickled - pleased is the word. I'm elated to be able to see the increase in federal support for the work that

you are doing in your community. Compared to your \$11.9 million appropriation four years ago, today the appropriation is \$40 million. Many of you in the audience recently applied for a drug court grant. It gives me great pleasure today to be able to announce over \$34 million in drug court grants for this year. Last year the number of successful applications outweighed the federal funding available and in an effort to assist communities and prevent you from having to apply again - in the first month of fiscal year 1999, we have awarded close to \$20 million to 70 communities to implement or enhance our drug courts. In addition to that, today we're announcing the award of an additional \$14 million in grants. Eight communities will receive assistance planning a drug court, 47 communities will receive assistance to continue their drug courts, 19 communities receive assistance to enhance their drug courts. I have been assured by the drug court program officer that ample copies of the press release and the list of communities that will receive federal funding will be distributed here and are available. My congratulations to those successful communities.

We can't stop there. It is not money that's going to make the drug courts the tremendous success it can be, it is people constantly asking the best of themselves and their colleagues. Constantly trying to figure out how we can do it better. Constantly trying to maintain the highest standards of treatment of professionalism, of care, of concern but remembering that people are involved.

I can still remember sitting in the back of the room trying to look inconspicuous in the drug court and one morning Judge Goldstein would tell the young man that he was disappointed. He got more fierce than that on other occasions, and he would take drastic action. The next time I see that young man in the drug court, he had succeeded in doing what was expected of him and the affirmation and the support and the figurative pat on the back that young man got was worth as much as treatment. Drug courts are about people, about solving their problems. Because of the people in this room from all over this country, we have shown that have you approached these problems with people in mind, with their hopes, their fears, their dreams, their

failures, their frustrations, and help them rebuild a life. We can solve their problems and we can solve the nation's problems and make this nation a safer, healthier place for all to live. I salute you. You are my heroes and my heroines.