ADDRESS

ATTORNEY GENERAL JANET RENO

LBJ Auditorium

LBJ Presidential Library

2313 Red River Street

Austin, Texas

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6:00 p.m.

P R O C E E D I N G S

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Thank you so much, Catherine. Mrs. Johnson, I told you this afternoon that one of the reasons I was in public service was because of Lyndon Johnson.

(Applause.)

I will always remember his quiet, deep Texas voice in those tragic hours of November 1963, as he and you helped hold a nation together in tragedy.

I remember the passage of the Civil Rights Act, which it is my honor to still enforce. I remember the creation of Head Start, which I think is one of the great institutions in this country.

And then today, Luci pointed out to me one of the wonderful

exhibits in this great institution in which he said, as he wrote to you, "I want to do things with drive. Plans, ideas, hopes, I'm bubbling over with them." And he was then, and he continued to. And his enthusiasm for using the public service to help people was absolutely contagious, so that's one of the reasons I'm here tonight.

When I came to Washington, I talked to a woman in the northeast section of the town. They told me of the block idea that you started while you were at the White House. They told me that there were still blocks where your influence was felt, even now. And you understand just what each person can do to make a difference.

What have I learned in these seven years in Washington? It is the greatest opportunity any lawyer can have, to try to use the law to help people, to make a difference, to improve the lives of all Americans. Public service is one of the great, great undertakings.

You get cussed at, fussed at, and figuratively beaten around the ears, but I haven't figured a better way to spend my life, and it has been truly rewarding. But one of the great lessons that I have learned is the democracy is one of the most fragile, wonderful creations of people.

We take it for granted. Until you see a minister of justice walk into the conference room of the Attorney General's office, a minister of justice from an emerging democracy in Eastern Europe, and sit down and talk to you about his hopes and dreams and plans and ideas, and then you see him six months, a year later, some of those hopes and dreams dashed, dashed by powers greater than him, and you realize how fortunate we are to live in this democracy and how important it is that we renew our commitment to it almost daily.

How do you keep it strong? How do you maintain it? I think the answer lies in part in community. A community that functions well is splendid to behold. This city that we're in today has a great reputation as a community that functions.

But we sometimes take our communities for granted, and some of them literally fall apart. They lack the cohesion, the spirit, the know-how, the can-do, that can give people an opportunity and a basis for living in a positive, constructive way.

How do you build a community? The answers lies in the integrity of the people and the efficiency of government and legislation such as Head Start, in openness in government and adherence to the Constitution. But there is something more in community.

You've got to listen closely and listen with a listening ear, to all the people, not just some of the people. And you will hear a nation that has been on the move, a community that changes, even in the lifetime of people who've lived there.

You see single parents and families in which both parents are working, to try to make ends meet, who do not have quality time with their children. You see skills become obsolete, and a 45-year-old person wonder what they're going to do next. You see bitterness, and then you see hate.

You see people who are alone, afraid, set apart, and some alienated. What do we do about that? How do we bring these people back into community? People want to find a way to solve their problems. They'd like to solve them themselves, if we could only create a structure that would permit it, and if we can't create the structure, then they want us to solve some of these problems.

But the truth is, ladies and gentlemen, we're not very good about solving problems. In elementary school, our children are not taught how to solve problems without knives and guns and fists. They're simply taught, Don't use the knives, the guns, the fists. We've got to start teaching them, This is the problem; let's solve it together by talking it out, working it out, and learning how to negotiate and mediate and solve the issues confronting us.

Most police officers are taught how to arrest, but the kid

is taught, Don't commit the crime. He's not taught: This is the problem that caused the crime. How can we work together with family and other institutions to solve the problem that caused the crime in the first place?

Is it drugs? Let's get treatment. But that' snot enough. What caused the need for drugs in the first place? What are the ingredients that will solve that problem?

Lawyers like to prosecute. They like to say they solved the problem when they get a conviction. But they don't know what's going to happen to the person when he comes back to the apartment over the open-air drug market. They don't know what's going to happen while he's in prison, if there are no resources committed to giving him a chance for a strong and positive future. Let's look at the real problem and get it solved.

But if we look at the real problem, we will learn that one of the major problems that lawyers have is that for too many people in America, the law means little more than the paper it's written on, because a significant number of Americans can't afford a lawyer or access to justice. We've got to solve that problem, if we are to make the laws of this country that we hold so dear real for all Americans.

And, ladies and gentlemen, unless we make them real for all Americans, we're not going to have the democracy that we cherish and the strength that we expect to exist.

Thus, I ask you: What are the ingredients of problem-solving? Lawyers can learn to do it better. Let's not try the cases. Let's solve the problem that caused the need for the trial in the first place.

But let's focus on community. Let's build federal partnerships. I never liked the feds who came to town and said, This is what you must do, and this is what we want from you. I like feds who come to town to say, You understand your needs and resources better than we do; how can we work together as a partner to solve them.

I think it is important in this great and wondrous institution that we're in now, this great university and this great school, that we start teaching people to work together across disciplines to solve problems.

The criminal justice specialist is not going to solve the problem of crime by themselves. The doctor's not going to solve health problems by himself. We've got to assume new relationships. And if there is a criticism I have of institutions of higher education, it is that we have become too specialized, and it is important, if we're to realize the solution of problems, that we start having the public health specialist work with the prosecutor, work with the teacher, work with the parks and recreation specialist, work with the person in the private sector, to make a difference.

Lyndon Johnson was a schoolteacher. He taught America as he taught the class in South Texas. He cared passionately about teaching, and he knew its great worth. But this university must do all it can to teach its teachers how to solve problems and then how to teach their students to solve problems.

You remember the rate test that we had: If the car was going 5 miles an hour for 30 miles, how many miles per gallon would you use? And it had no relevance, and it was awful.

(General laughter.)

Let's put it in human terms. On the day of Martin Luther King's birthday, I worked in a house in St. Louis with 15 young men. They were so excited about what they had learned in building that house.

They'd never been good in fractions in school. They dropped out of school because it hadn't seemed relevant, but now they understood fractions better than ever before. Let's start teaching new ways to teach, so that people can appreciate it in the real world.

We cannot neglect the wonderful masters. We cannot neglect the poet, because these young men understood poetry as well. But we have got to shape teaching, so that it hits people where they can appreciate it, not just in the mind but in the heart and the spirit as well.

Let us develop a coherent continuum. People ask, Well, look at Head Start; look at all that it did. Head Start doesn't make any difference if the child has no supervision from six years old role model, no tutor, nobody to go to, to talk to, in a time when it is so difficult to grow up in this country.

Let us leave out no generation. If we're going to problem-solve, we should start at the beginning, but then we leave out too many young, fine people, who can make a marvelous contribution in this world. Let us provide for a continuum.

And one thing I ask: Everybody says it takes money. Yes, it takes money. But if we do it right, and if we solve the problems up front, we're going to save money down the line.

(Applause.)

For every dollar invested in prenatal care, the indications are that we can save $ down the line. Let us use our resources in the wisest way possible and let us solve problems up front.

Let us gather information. There's a lot of partisan rhetoric about crime in Washington, but you go out across this great country, and you will find Democratic U.S. attorneys standing with Republican sheriffs, working together in common-sense ways, to gather information and to figure out how they use their resources as wisely as possible to make a difference.

And then using these principles, how do we go about problem-solving? Let's take crime, for example. Crime is down seven years in a row. You hear people trumpet that. It's at the lowest level in a generation, people claim. True. But do people feel safe? Do people feel immune from hate?

We still see Columbine. We still see drive-bys. We still see far too much crime. But, ladies and gentlemen, I believe with all my heart that if we continue a thoughtful, bipartisan, common-sense approach to problem-solving, we can end the culture of violence in this nation as we have known it for the last 30 years and make a substantial impact and a lasting impact on crime in this country.

(Applause.)

But you can't do it just dabbling. It requires a sustained commitment from people who care, and it's hard to do. Louis Shore says that trying to keep community together, trying to build neighborhood programs into bigger communities, is one of the most difficult jobs of all, but if we use a problem-solving approach, we can make a difference.

I start by talking about building blocks. And the building blocks, the foundation that I know, is the zero to three years. When the crack epidemic hit Miami in 1985, the doctors told me to the public hospital to try to figure out what to do about crack-involved infants and their mothers. And they taught me that the first three years of life is the most formative. The child learns the concept of reward and punishment, and develops a conscience.

And on the way home from that meeting, I said, What good are all the prisons going to be 18 years from now, if that child doesn't have a conscience and hasn't learned what punishment means? And what good are all the schools going to be ten years from now and the great institutions of higher learning? What good are they going to be, if we don't give this child a foundation now?

Now, the best way to do it is to have strong and healthy parents. And how do you go about that? One of the first things you've got to do is realize that you must have peaceful parents to do it right. The child who sees his father beat his mother comes to accept violence as a way of life, and there is a clear correlation. Let's do something about it.

We can ignore it, which is what we did. We accepted it, up until recently. We can respond to it, by sending police and prosecutors and judges out to deal with it, who are not trained. That doesn't work very well. We can send police, prosecutors, and judges and who are trained and who are committed to doing something about domestic violence, but give them no resources to do anything about it, and it works a little better.

And we can give them resources in terms of drug treatment and alcohol treatment and anger control counseling, and we can do even more about it. But we can do a lot more. We can teach people from the time they first start to grow up, that they do not have to accept being slapped around, that it is unacceptable in our society for somebody to hit somebody else they love.

Churches can teach it. The family physician can have materials in their anteroom. Pediatricians can deal with the problem. Churches can speak out. This has been a subject that people wanted to sweep under the rug and not admit was happening. Let us speak out about it, and let us, for once and for all, do something to say that domestic violence in any form is unacceptable, and we can make a difference if we solve the problem up front.

(Applause.)

It's fine if you have peaceful parents, but if they're never there, what good are they going to do, if they're trying to make ends meet? I still remember the fact that we didn't have matching china and that some of the chair legs were broken early on, but I loved my childhood.

My mother taught us to play baseball. She taught us to appreciate Beethoven's symphonies. She taught us to play fair. She punished us, and she loved us with all her heart. And there is no child care in the world that will ever be a substitute for what that lady was in our life.

What can we do to make a difference? How can we structure our workplaces to give parents, both parents, quality time

with their children? We can do nothing about it. Or we can provide child care. But I've got a better word. If 50 percent of all learned human response is learned in the first year of life, then the word should be "educare" not "childcare."

And if holding and reading and talking to children is as important as we know it to be, then let us make sure we have loving, kind people, and the best people for doing that are parents. Let us give parents the opportunity to excel professionally, to achieve their dreams, and both of them to take good care of their children.

How do we do that? Well, some, as the Justice Department, have experimented with telecommuting, and some have done job-sharing, and there've been liberal leave policies. But I've got a proposal, and I was told I would be marginalized if I make this suggestion, but I've been making it for the last ten years and it makes sense to me, and nobody has really disagreed.

Why don't we have two shifts? A parent shift in the morning, that takes the children to school, picks them up at about 2:30 or 3:00, brings them home, and spends the afternoon and evening with them, while the golfer shift starts at 11:00 and works through till about 7:00 or 8:00, and they, together organize a workplace that puts children first.

Now, if you say, what is the businessman going to say about that, all we have to do is look at the fact that we are having to give visas to foreign workers because we don't have the skills in our workforce necessary to fill the jobs that are fueling this tremendous economy. Let us make an investment in America's children, not just in dollars, but in time and love and care and supervision.

(Applause.)

Let us look at health care as a problem. We can treat the child's tertiary problems, the fact that he's in jail because he didn't get treated for a high fever when he was

three years old; the fact that he didn't get appropriate care for an obviously diagnosable problem because there wasn't health care available.

Let us make sure that child has the primary care, the primary medical care and the attention, not just with physical illness but with mental health and emotional problems. What we have done in the 40 years of my adult life, in terms of advances in mental health, staggers the imagination. Let's use it.

Let's make sure the children of America are identified without being labeled and that we do something to solve their problems before we see travesties and tragedies occur, where children gun down their classmates and gun down teachers. We can make a difference.

Education: We can rail about big classrooms, about rundown schools, but Lyndon Johnson probably taught in a school that we would consider perhaps rundown, and he had to ask his mother for 200 packages of toothpaste for the kids because they had so little. And I bet you he was a great and inspired teacher. The only thing I wonder is did he give them a chance to say anything. (General laughter.) But I think I could have sat and listened to him all day, as he told me what was needed to be prepared for the future.

We've got to do something about a nation that pays its football players in the six-digit figures and pay its teachers what we pay them.

(Applause.)

We have got to make sure that teachers know how wonderful they are, how much we prize them, and how much we'd like these people who used to be teachers and now have gone off to be lawyers, why don't you come back and teach a little bit, too, and teach our kids to problem-solve, teach our kids to communicate, to talk to each other, not like this, not like this, not like this, but to talk and to listen and to hear, and to solve problems. You can. It is possible to teach a child to resolve conflicts, to learn how to

mediate.

Let us get to that, so that we get beyond youth violence in forms that we never dreamed would exist. Let us hear their call for help.

Too many parents, too many teachers today do not know how to talk to kids, do not know how to hear their cries for help.

When I talk to young people who have been in trouble or who are in trouble now and ask them, What could have made a difference, they say, Somebody to talk to, somebody who understands how hard it is to grow up in America today, somebody that doesn't put me down, somebody that gives me the sense that I am somebody and I can make a difference, but somebody that gives me a good talking-to when I deserve it, because I know I deserve it some of the time.

Let us teach our kids, all our kids, not just some, what's relevant for the future. In Birmingham one day, I asked a class, What should we do about violence. Oh, we got violence licked, Ms. Reno; what we need are computers, and then we need teachers who can teach us how to use the computers.

But look at what we have: a nation that is developing the skills. Let us organize ourselves, so that all America has access to the technology of tomorrow, so we will be prepared in every way.

Let us make sure that we teach everyone basic skills that will enable them to live a life of lifelong learning. When they lose that job at 45, we should understand that there will be a continuing education effort in place, in every community in America, that can make a difference.

And let us teach our elderly how to become teachers. There's a lot of problem-solving that's gone into retirement and is playing golf and that would much rather come back and make a difference.

One of the days I will never forget is an old man standing up and saying, You know how old I am and what I do three mornings a week. I said, No, sir. He said, I'm 84 years old, and I volunteer as a teacher's aide three mornings a week for three hours each morning.

And a young woman stood up next to him, and she said, I'm the first-grade teacher for whom he volunteers, and the children cannot wait for their time with him. Those with learning disabilities find him opening new doors for them. And those that are advanced find him taking them around the world, day after day, in new adventure. We can, each one of us, make a difference.

What about violence? It's going to happen. We can go out and arrest the person. We can convict them. We can send them to prison, do nothing about the drug problem that got them there in the first place, let them leave and go back and watch the same thing start all over again. Or we can be smart and problem-solve.

We can prevent, through developing programs that provide supervision in the afternoon, preferably by parents, but otherwise by responsible, caring adults; by mentors who are involved.

Police can learn to be problem-solvers, to spot the parent on drugs before it is too late, to do something about the local bar that is causing homicides and stabbings and see what can be done to shut them down.

A good police officer -- have you ever been stopped by an officer? Lady, you're driving too fast, as opposed to, Good evening, ma'am; you're going too fast; you're going to hurt somebody, and I don't want you to hurt yourself. And talking to a young man, age 18, who wants to feel good about himself and knows he's done something wrong, that officer, by tone of voice and by manner, can make all the difference in the world, if we look at it from a problem-solving point of view.

The good police officer can do something special in America

today. Instead of dividing us, he can bring us together. He can take that young man who's on the verge of getting in trouble and sit down and talk with him and help him through the processes, or he can be gruff and unapproachable.

What else can we do? We can research crime and why it occurs, but sometimes that's easier said than done. Today we have traffic fatalities that are researched with respect to every fatality in the country. We know how many right-turn-on-reds lead to fatalities; we know 15 other factors that lead to fatalities. Why don't we do the same thing guns?

Why don't we join forces with the public health specialists in this country and others and consider guns as a problem of health, as well as criminal justice? Why don't we have the same data, so that we can make sure that those who illegally possess or use guns are properly addressed through prosecution, conviction, and sentences that fit the crime, but that we take steps to make sure that people are licensed, so that they know how to safely and lawfully use the weapon, so that they know how to safely store it, so that children who are brought into emergency rooms receive counseling, so that they do not become the perpetrator as opposed to the victim, as they seek revenge.

We can do so much if we problem-solve rather than just doing a lick and a dab at the end. But one of the areas that we must focus on is the fact that each year for the next five years, 400- to 500,000 people will return from jails and prisons across the country to communities just like Austin. We can do it again. We can do nothing, and the problem will recur again and again. Or we can problem-solve. We can let them come back to a filthy apartment, over an open-air drug market, or we can provide them with a safety support system.

There is an alternative. With the business community taking the lead, we can develop what we are calling re-entry programs: business, law enforcement and others, working together to make sure that while in prison, these offenders utilize their time to learn a skill that can enable them to match a job in the outside; that they can start learning

how to write to their children, and if they make money in prison industries, that they pay some support for their child and start to build the sense of family and responsibility and accountability.

Let us develop churches, private not-for- profits, and others on the outside who will serve as an advocate, both for the person while he is in prison and a support mechanism when he comes back. Let us have a court that manages it, that says, We're here to help you, but if you mess up, you're going back because we're going to hold you accountable. We can make a difference.

We won't solve all the problems. Lyndon Johnson knew that. The marvelous institution of this library shows the hopes and the fears, but, ladies and gentlemen, we can, using his enthusiasm, his belief in people, his belief in people if they're only given half a chance, they can do so much for themselves, we can make a difference. Violence does not have to be in this country. From 1992 till 1996, Chicago had over 3,000 gun homicides. Toronto, a city of somewhat similar size, had 100. Violence does not have to be.

In these seven years, I have seen so many communities, so many young people, so much energy, so much enthusiasm. In the young men who I worked with in St. Louis on January 15, there was pride. At first they looked at me like they didn't think I could do anything. Then I nailed some three-penny nails without bending them, and they decided I was okay.

(General laughter.)

But in each one of those young men, there was enthusiasm; there was commitment; there was dedication. And you knew they were going to make it, if this support mechanism that was working with them continued.

This is a marvelous country. I am so proud to have a chance to work with so many wonderful people in the government, but most of all, so terribly, terribly proud of Americans, who go out and volunteer or contribute or work to make a

difference for all of us.

You are not taking our marvelous, wonderful democracy for granted. You are making a difference, and for that I salute you and thank you.

(Applause.)

(Whereupon, at 6:40 p.m., the address was concluded and was followed by a questions and answers.)