



REMARKS OF ATTORNEY GENERAL JANET RENO

Before the

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P R O C E E D I N G S

ROBIN REED: I'd like to introduce to you now Representative Leanna Washington from the state of Pennsylvania, who will introduce the Attorney General.

MS. WASHINGTON: Thank you. Attorney General Janet Reno is the first Attorney General --

first woman Attorney General of the United States of America. Nominated by President Clinton February 11, 1993, Attorney General Janet Reno was confirmed by the United States Senate on March 12th, 1993.

Attorney General Reno attended Harvard University Law School, one of only 16 women in a class of 500 students. She was born in Miami, Florida, and began her career in the state of Florida, serving in the Judiciary Committee of the Florida House of Representatives and in the Dade County State's Attorney General's office.

In 1978, she was appointed State Attorney General for Dade County. In November 1978, Attorney General Reno was elected to the office of State Attorney and was returned to office by the voters four more terms. Among many honors (inaudible) was awarded the (inaudible) American Judiciary

Society, 1981, the Public Administrator of the Year,
American Society for Public Administration 1983 (inaudible)
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(Applause.)

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Thank you very much. I am delighted to be here with you today. The National Foundation for Women Legislators has done so much to improve the quality of government and governing in America. I worked for the legislature as -- how is that? Is that better?

ROBIN REED: There is some noise back there. There was a camera that was just turned on that is making too much noise. Our audience cannot hear. The press office (inaudible).

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Well, I'm going to try -- can you hear me?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: It's a speaker that needs to be unplugged.

ROBIN REED: Attorney General, do the best you can and we will listen with great effort.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Okay. I would like to talk to you about violence against women and domestic violence, and I would like to give you a perspective of how far we have come because of your efforts and the efforts of others in the court system and otherwise, who have come to realize that unless we do something about violence in the home, violence against women, domestic violence, we're never going to solve the problem of violence on the streets of America.

(Applause.)

We have a really incredible opportunity here, but we have watched the crime rates go down in America seven years in a row. There is a tendency on the part of people, when something like that happens, to become complacent and to turn their thoughts to other issues. We cannot become

complacent. We have learned what can happen when Republican legislators and Democratic legislators work together, where Republican and Democratic city commissioners and county commissioners work together to approach crime from a commonsense point of view, approach it based on solid information, approach it based on evaluation of what works and what doesn't work, and then put into effect what's working.

We have seen that we can make a difference, but one area that has proven intractable in terms of real reduction in crime is in the area of domestic violence.

Where have we come from? Back in 1978, I became a State Attorney in Dade County. The medical examiner said why don't you come over and look to see who has been killed and let's see if we can do something about it based on solid information.

40 percent of the homicides in the previous 20-year period or 25-year period were related to domestic violence -- boyfriend girlfriend, ex-spouse, husband and wife. And we established a domestic intervention program. Then the courts said, but, Janet, that's just a domestic. Then the police officers said that's just a domestic.

But police departments around the country started noticing something, that those domestics were one of the most dangerous calls that a police officer receives. And something else started happening in the court system. More women got elected judges.

(Applause.)

And in the 15 years I was State Attorney, you could see the sea change and suddenly the judge who used to say, Janet, it's just a domestic would not dare be heard to say something like that.

We have come a long way because just about the time I became State Attorney, the police departments were developing sex battery units with police officers who

understood how to investigate such a crime, how to work with victims, how to immediately refer them and how to provide support and encouragement during the most difficult time.

We started a rape treatment center, and that now seems commonplace, but then it was really something to behold, and the work that it has done has been so vitally important.

We, because of your efforts and the efforts of other women across this nation, have come a long, long way. But where do we go from here?

I firmly believe that if we approach crime on a community basis, and if we develop partnerships, we can really organize ourselves far more effectively than we have before.

A community understands its needs and resources better than somebody in the state capital understands it, better than somebody in the national capital understands it, and we have experience at the state and federal level about what works and what doesn't work in different communities so we can share it with you, or we can identify a wonderful program and provide technical assistance. And I'll go into in a minute the grants that we have provided pursuant to the Violence Against Women Act. But it takes more. It takes a partnership with the private sector, as well.

Why don't we get preachers and rabbis talking from the pulpit and the bimah about domestic violence and the fact that it should not happen and you should not expect it to happen?

(Applause.)

This is not a forbidden subject. Let's not wait until the violence occurs. Let's not wait until a family is shattered. Let's not wait until that child observes his father hitting his mother so that he comes to accept violence as a way of life.

Let's start in the community and start building a community feeling, sentiment and spirit, that a young woman as she starts to school, as she goes to school, as she grows up, as she goes to college, as she has a family, should absolutely never expect or in any way tolerate something like that happening to her and let us give her the courage of her convictions.

(Applause.)

How can schools come to grips with it?

How can physicians come to grips with it? I sit in my doctor's office and I look at all the pamphlets and I have never seen a pamphlet on domestic violence, but it is as much a public health problem as so many of the other issues, of smoking and nutrition and the like. Let us make sure that every pediatrician addresses that in a positive, instructive way to prevent it. Let us make sure that every family physician knows how to talk about it, provide information concerning it, and give his patient or her patient the support they need to deal with it.

We can do so much if we form partnerships, and the public health/criminal justice participate has proven to be effective. We have approached the whole problem of youth violence from that point of view. We can use the same model with physicians and criminal justice people working together in the area of violence against women.

Let us make sure that our police officers are trained, not to just respond to the call where somebody has been badly hurt or killed. Let us enhance community policing a step further. I want police officers to be known as problem solvers and peacemakers, as people who bring a community together.

There are so many wonderful professional, dedicated and caring policewomen and policemen across this country. Instead of waiting, they could notice the tension in the community, they could talk with the wife, they could have a system of referral for counseling. We can do so much if we

reach out before violence occurs and prevent it, and if we develop a partnership between the federal, state, and local officials and the partnership between the private sector and the criminal justice system.

Think about it. We can do so much, but we have got to pursue in all ways possible further action that will let people know, yes, it may have been accepted long ago, yes, a judge may have said that is just a domestic, but it's a domestic that can kill, it's a domestic that can tear a child's life apart, it's a domestic that indicates too often that violence is tolerated. And in this nation the message should be no, it's not.

(Applause.)

Congress and the President join together again in a marvelous bipartisan effort, recognizing the seriousness of these crimes in the Violence Against Women Act which was signed into law in 1994.

For the first time there was a mandate for all of us to work together, to figure out what could be done.

For the first time there was a mandate to law enforcement to work together, to sit down around the same table and figure out what could be done.

Since 1995, the Department of Justice has awarded over \$800 million in grants to all 50 states, the District of Columbia, 6 territories, 142 tribal governments serving 281 native communities.

Through the grants programs of the Violence Against Women Act we have directed critical resources to state and local efforts to respond to this. These funds have reached across the nation to rural areas and to urban areas. And, ladies, we cannot forget the rural areas of America in designing our grant program.

(Applause.)

The one domestic violence case in a small town in three years can have the same searing, horrible impact that 20 in a major urban neighborhood can have. We have got to look at all America. I Now, having seen some of the successes, we call from Congress to reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act. In the nation where more than one-third of women murdered in the year are killed by their intimate partners, where domestic violence accounts for 20 percent of all violence crimes, where over 1 million women are stalked each year and more than a quarter million women were sexually assaulted in 1996 alone, we clearly still have much to do.

I look forward to working with Congress to ensure that we reauthorize the volume of grant programs this year and that we strengthen it, improve it, and expand many of the provisions. As we recognize the success --

(Applause.)

-- we must continue to build upon the foundation that we have built. I would like to talk to you about four critical areas in which I think we need to continue our ongoing collaborative efforts to end violence against women.

First, we must address violence against our young women. In 1998, BJS presented their national findings. I was struck by the high number of domestic abuse against young people aged 16 to 19.

Young women in this age group were victimized by intimates at nearly the identical rate of women age 20 to 24, about one violent victimization for every 50 women. That is not tolerable.

What can we do? Let's look. The rate of intimate partner violence was higher for these two age groups than any other age group. Here's how we should go about it. Let's talk to the people in public health. Let's talk to specialists. Let's look together around this country and find out if there are programs aimed at these two age groups.

How can we focus on them? How can we use the knowledge we have as wisely as possible and then how can we control and evaluate to see what's working and what's not working.

We have got \$800 million in grants monies given out in the last five years. What works and what doesn't work? Let's make sure we use our grants monies as wisely as possible to ensure that we evaluate; and if it's not working, let's get rid of it. Let's not get attached to something just because good old Ms. So-and-so has been the major proponent of it for so long.

(Applause.)

Let us move on and rely on solid information to inform our efforts and to help us construct programs that work.

We need the legal tools to prosecute abusers and to make young victims safe. We need education and prevention programs directed at these young people 16 to 24. Many of those are in college and in graduate school. They are away from home for the first time. They don't know where to go to. Let us work with universities around the country to make sure that there is a support mechanism and an atmosphere in that institution of higher learning that makes clear this type of abuse will not be tolerated.

On the federal level, the Department of Justice is working with Congress to develop legislation to expand federal prosecutions and grants to include dating violence in all jurisdictions. I urge you to pass laws in your states that help victims of dating violence obtain relief by expanding state protection orders to include victims of dating violence.

Secondly, federal and state authorities must work together to ensure that perpetrators of domestic violence are prosecuted to the full extent, whether under federal or state law.

Nearly 30 percent of all female homicides in the country are committed by a woman's intimate partner. Over 60

percent of these murders involve the use of firearms. The mere presence of a gun in the home dramatically increases the likelihood that domestic violence will escalate into murder. We have worked to address this danger at the federal level with new laws that make interstate domestic violence a federal crime and prohibit persons who are subject to a valid protection order or who have been convicted of a qualifying domestic violence misdemeanor from possessing a firearm. We should make sure that that bar continues.

(Applause.)

We have worked hard over the past six years to enforce these new laws. We have designated an assistant United States Attorney to serve as a violence against women contact in each U.S. Attorney's office. We have reached out to local law enforcement and local prosecutors to forge partnerships to ensure that appropriate cases are referred for federal prosecutions.

For example, United States Attorney in Massachusetts worked on the Brockton Safety First Initiative, a collaborative between federal and local people involved in the domestic violence effort.

With DOJ funding, the Brockton group is using police data to map incidents and identify specific areas, geographic areas of concern. They are also compiling information on multiple offenders and they are devising new protocols to deal with these offenders.

I don't know how many of you have ever spent time in a court system, but there is nothing more heartbreaking than to pick up a rap sheet of somebody who has murdered or seriously hurt somebody and see one, two, three, four times before that they have been to court; either she didn't want to prosecute, the case was dropped, it went forward, she said she didn't want him to go to prison because ... Nothing was done.

Let us make sure that we have punishment that fits the

crime, but that in addition we recognize that many people are coming out sooner rather than later. And, ladies, it makes no sense to send somebody back into the world, to the neighborhood, to the home where they committed the crime without having support mechanisms, follow-up, aftercare and efforts that make a difference.

We are proposing -- (applause).

Wait. Neither does it make any difference on a scale with respect to general crime that 400 to 500 thousand people are coming out of our prisons each year for the next five years, many of them coming out without skills that enable them to earn a living wage, without opportunities for jobs, without being able to read, without being able to do common arithmetic, without knowing how to use a computer, and oftentimes with the vestiges of an alcohol or a drug problem that was not thoroughly addressed in the prison.

Let us use the prison time to address the problem that caused the crime in the first place and then let us develop re-entry programs that give people coming back into the community a chance of success.

(Applause.)

Now, that's easier said than done, but it is so exciting to see people who want to succeed when they get out. I recently had the chance to work at a building that was being revitalized by YouthBuild young people and by AmeriCorps. It was a very rainy day so we ended up inside and they at first were suspicious of me when I arrived because I arrived with television cameras.

Well, television cameras turned off the lights and left pretty soon and I stayed so they looked at me like I might be a keeper. But they were still not sure until I hammered about 50 three-penny nails in the studding and didn't bend one of the nails, then they decided I was okay.

And they talked about their dreams and about what they were trying to do with their families. About half of them, I

think, had been to prison, and they wanted so to have respect. They wanted so to succeed. Think about what we can do if we develop re-entry courts and re-entry partnerships that give people a chance to come out of prison with some defined goals, with some opportunities, but with the duty to report back to the court on a regular basis and operate on a carrot-and-stick approach with the court and the court's resources being a commitment to that person that if they follow the rules and regulations, they are going to get the carrot; if they don't, they are going to get the stick.

We have an example in this country that has worked. In 1987, we established a drug court in Dade County because the first offender charged with possession of a small amount of cocaine was not getting either punishment or treatment. I can remember there was about five of us in the room as we talked about how we were going to establish this court. People were puzzled and they doubted us. We got it into effect and one person said don't let yourselves be spread too thin. Control the caseload.

Make sure that the caseload is such that the judge will know the people appearing before him. Make sure that the resources for treatment will match what is needed.

Ten years later I went back to Miami for the National Drug Court Conference. There were over 200 drug courts in existence, some 300 more on the drawing board, and it has been a wave that has swept across this nation. But we can use other courts in the same vein: domestic violence courts, re-entry courts. If we give them the resources to do the job and do not expect that judges are superhuman, but only human people with wisdom who care so much. I urge all of you to think in terms of what the courts can do in this country if they are given the resources and they are given caseloads they can match. This is certainly true in re-entry, and re-entry as it specifically applies to domestic violence.

In Maine, the United States Attorney's office identified domestic violence -- now, this is the United States Attorney's office -- identified domestic violence as the

number one crime problem in the state and the cause of over 50 percent of all homicides in the state of Maine. They responded by reaching out to local law enforcement to again form the partnerships. We prosecuted over 17 federal domestic violence cases in Maine referred to us by state and local authorities. We're not interested in grabbing the headlines, we're not interested in claiming the credit, or we're not interested in the turf. We want to work with state and local prosecutors to make sure that the case is done the right way and in the best interest of the state and community we all serve.

In Washington State, our United States Attorney's office worked with the Spokane County Domestic Violence Consortium and the Washington State courts to ensure that protection orders issued in the state provided notice of important issues that assist our federal prosecutors in bringing perpetrators to order. Now protection orders issued there provide notice that the orders must be enforced in other states and territories under the full faith and credit provisions of the Violence Against Women Act.

Federal law prohibits firearm possession during the pendency of the order. Violation of the order, in addition to subjecting the violator to state and local sanctions, may subject the respondent to prosecution for federal crimes, such as interstate travel to commit domestic violence, interstate stalking and interstate violation of protection orders.

These are things that we are doing and more of what can be done if we do it together and we don't worry about who gets the credit.

The third issue I would like to address is an issue that is of critical importance, the custody and safety of children. Like protection orders, custody laws have a tremendous impact on the safety of victims of domestic violence and their children.

Victims may flee across state lines or tribal lines in order to escape from abusers. When they do, they may lose

custody of their children in the state from which they fled.

Interstate custody laws also come into play when perpetrators of domestic violence seize their children and cross state lines to punish victims for the long relationship they have had.

Federal and state laws can help prevent abusers from using custody cases to control and punish victims.

In many states they are already working to protect victims of domestic violence from the unintended consequence of jurisdictional custody laws.

So far, 12 states have adopted the Uniform Child Custody Jurisdiction and Enforcement Act.

Somebody has got to get a better name for it than that. This Act contains several provisions designed specifically to protect victims of domestic violence and to deter perpetrators of abuse from manipulating custody laws. The Act expands emergency jurisdiction to include domestic violence, it requires courts to protect identifying information about a party if disclosure would harm the child or the party. It helps safeguard a domestic violence victim's address while she is in hiding. Third, the Act for the first time requires courts to consider whether domestic violence occurred and which state could best protect the parties and the child when determining which state should hear the child custody case.

Finally, the Act protects victims through its unclean hands doctrine. The law clarifies that victims should not be punished for conduct that occurred in the process of fleeing domestic violence.

And I think we have got even more to see that that thought is effective throughout the country.

I urge you to consider an adoptee act. We are working with Congress to ensure that federal law provides similar

protection for families and children.

Just as it is important that victims of domestic violence should not be forced to forfeit their custody rights, it is important to ensure that visitation with children take place in a safe environment.

Finally, I would like to address one final issue, and that is the problem of stalking on the Internet. We have provided advices on this, but this is a real problem, and it helps us focus on this particular problem that affects violence against women. But there is a larger problem that all of us are going to have to come to grips with.

If a man can sit in his home halfway around the world and stalk in a terrible way a young woman here, if a man can sit in a kitchen in St. Petersburg, Russia, and steal from a bank in New York, if a man can sit on an island in the Caribbean watching the sun set and intrude in other people's lives by stealing their identifiers, by stealing their Social Security numbers, by stealing their credit card numbers, and then extort them, if our privacy is at risk, we are going to have to deal with whole new issues in law enforcement, whether it be on stalking or in any other issue.

How do we bring that person to justice?

How do we arrange for extradition? How do we try the case? Boundaries are going to become meaningless in the cyber age, but it is very important, whether it be on the issue of stalking or any other, that this nation come together with its colleagues around the world to understand that unless we make sure that the Internet is used as our law permits, we're going to be in a more difficult situation.

I don't think I have to tell you that all of these issues sometimes as Adlai Stevenson said, stagger the imagination and convert vanity to prayer.

I think every public official should remember those lines. I do regularly.

Some people ask me why I participate in public service. I suspect you know the answer just like I do, that I have never found anything more rewarding or more half worth doing than trying to use the law to help make this a safer, healthier, better nation. Sometimes you feel like you take three steps forward and four steps back. Sometimes you get figuratively beaten around the head and cussed at and fussed at. Sometimes you get terrible editorials written about you and you think it's the end of the world.

But all I can say to you is thank you for carrying on the spirit of public service, for letting young women in colleges and elementary school everywhere around this country know that public service is so rewarding and that you can make a difference.

I salute you for all you do for your community, your state and your nation, and I look forward to continuing to work with you in the years ahead on so many issues where I know if we just sit down, get politics out of it and talk about it and get the solid information, we can make a difference.

Now I'd be happy to try to answer your questions.

(Applause.)

ROBIN REED: The Attorney General has agreed to take two questions, and also to do some pictures. I would like to alert you that we will be going into lunch, because you are our VIPs, and there are many other VIPs coming to join you, so you will be going out this way, and I will announce who will be taking the pictures, but we do need to go to your assigned seats because C-Span will be covering the lunch and we need to begin promptly at 12:15.

Roger, would you ask the first question.

We had several.

ROGER: You have already addressed the issue of violence against women, but we have a question in terms of what is

the Justice Department doing about the trafficking of women, both internationally and within the U.S.?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: The question is

what are we doing about trafficking in women both domestically in the United States and internationally.

With respect to domestic trafficking, we have worked with the Department of Labor to form a task force between the Immigration and Naturalization Service where we find many of the cases arising in that context, and the Department of Labor where we find the violation of labor standards indicating that there is a problem area. We are also focused in an alien smuggling task force that occasionally stumbles into an effort where people are trafficking and exploiting women.

Again, the whole principle is if we work together we can truly make a difference, both in identifying the situation, referring to the U.S. Attorneys, all of whom have been alerted to this concern, and taking action.

Now, there is also trafficking around the world. That becomes a more problematic case because you've got to find people who are willing to testify.

You don't have law enforcement authority halfway around the world, you are dependent of investigators who don't want you to come into their country to investigate. You have witnesses that don't speak English and are frightened and you don't have a witness protection program in place in other countries. So it becomes more difficult, but this is something that we continue to focus on in every way that we can.

ROBIN REED: Thank you. Thank you. We are thrilled that the Attorney General will allow pictures, and what we will do is begin right now.

Won't you come up and just go right on through and go to your rooms.

Thank you, Attorney General, we are so grateful for your being with us.

(Applause.)

(Concluded at 12:04 p.m.)