



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

REMARKS OF ATTORNEY GENERAL JANET RENO

D.C. PUBLIC/PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP EVENT

Wednesday, June 7, 2000

George Washington University

Thunger Hall

2201 G Street, N.W

Washington, D.C

REMARKS OF ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO

(10:18 a.m.)

GENERAL RENO: Thank you, Jamie, for your wonderful service to this country. Mr. Mayor, thank you for all that you're doing with this wonderful city. Mr. Rutstein, that was a wonderful speech.

And to the people of Washington, thank you from the bottom of my heart. About 7-1/2 years ago I came to a city I did not know well. I'd wake up early in the morning and walk through its streets. On late afternoons and evenings I would explore further. I have come to love this city, and I have felt welcome.

I have watched the city begin to come together in these 7-1/2 years. I see new things happening. I see young men involved and caring, and Mr. Mayor, you and the people of

Washington have done so much.

There is much more to do. Although crime is down in Washington, although crime is down 7 years in a row in this Nation, there's still too much. Let me put it in perspective for you. From 1992 to 1996, Chicago had 3,063 gun homicides. Toronto, a city of similar size, had 100 during the same period. We've got far to go.

But everybody is right, partnership is the key. The involvement of the corporate world and business is absolutely critical, but never forget, no matter what you do, no matter what structures you build, no matter what financing schemes you develop, the ultimate answer lies in the people of Washington, every single person in Washington, and we can't lose any single one.

How do we do it? I think we think in terms of crime as building blocks. What are the building blocks to build strong, healthy children who can stay away from violence and lead strong, constructive lives. Why does the corporate sector care?

First of all, you care because you care about Washington, because you care about these kids, because you care about the safety of your community, but if that doesn't impress you, you care because you need a workforce that can sustain your company as a first-rate company and help maintain America as the greatest Nation in the world. We need a workforce that has the skills, that can compete, that can make a difference, and schools by themselves will not solve that problem.

The doctors say, I'm just a doctor with a middle-class practice. That's not my problem. It's your problem because the health care institutions will be brought to their knees unless we solve the problem of one of the epidemics in this country, youth violence.

(Applause.)

GENERAL RENO: All of us must care, and public health,

emergency room physicians, family doctors, the criminal justice sector must come together to say that unless we end violence in the home we are never going to end it on the streets of Washington. We have got to interrupt the cycle now, and there should be material in every doctor's office in Washington about domestic violence and where you go, and you shouldn't have to accept it.

(Applause.)

GENERAL RENO: But on the way over, Jamie reminded me that it does take money.

(Laughter.)

GENERAL RENO: And it does take an income stream. She's right, but there's an awful lot that can be done if you bring this income stream together with this grant, and this person, and this existing program, and put them together in a comprehensive effort that doesn't duplicate but provides a concerted leverage force.

Where do we begin? I've seen the difference that corporate partnerships can make. In Brooklyn, New York, a pharmaceutical company worked with local law enforcement, educators, and community organizations to renovate a 150-year-old building for a K through 8 public school. It installed a video monitoring system for the local subway station, it shut down open-air drug markets, and it built a park and playground. It encouraged others to do the same, and crime dropped.

In Philadelphia, a local baking company formed a community development corporation to combat rising crime, rampant vandalism, and flourishing youth gang activity. For more than 30 years, the baking company has worked closely with neighborhood residents, schools, and law enforcement.

It has helped rehabilitate over 300 derelict buildings into single family homes, converted abandoned warehouses into apartment buildings and community centers, revitalized the neighborhood's commercial district, created a local police

substation and municipal service center, and placed over 500 local high school students in career-related summer jobs by bringing people together, by identifying spark plugs in the community.

There is a Catholic nun there that is an absolute spark plug that no income stream could possibly replace, but she'd be the first to look for your income stream.

(Laughter.)

GENERAL RENO: U.S. Attorney Wilma Lewis is doing some wonderful things here in partnership in community prosecution that is making such a difference.

But where do we go? What do we do? How do we do it? First of all, we look at the building blocks: strong and healthy parents, children with appropriate preventative medical care, including prenatal care. We should make sure, Mr. Mayor, in Wards 7 and 8 that every single child has appropriate prenatal care before they come into this world, and every single child is eligible and is enrolled in programs for proper preventative medical care. We shouldn't wait to spend \$3 down the road for \$1 that we can invest now in proper prenatal care.

(Applause.)

GENERAL RENO: You've got the opportunity in Washington, because you have a lot of people who care and want to mentor. You have a discrete city with great pride. You've got the program that the mayor's planning in Wards 7 and 8. We can take it piece by piece and show that we can make a difference.

Now, sometimes you'll take four steps forward and five steps back. Don't get discouraged. Come at it again, but come at it a different way this time and figure out what you did wrong before.

The second thing is, Educare. Every child development expert tells me that the time from zero to 3 is the most

important time in a person's life. You learn the concept of reward and punishment, and develop a conscience. What good are all the prisons going to be 18 years from now, if a person doesn't have a conscience and doesn't understand punishment? Let's make the investment now in Educare.

(Applause.)

GENERAL RENO: Let's figure how that corporate entity that wants to contribute can make a difference, through proper opportunities for both parents to spend quality time with that child during those formative years.

I never understood what bonding meant, but I will tell you, some corporate executives have come closer to telling me and explaining to me what bonding means, when I see somebody able to take time off from work to go to the day care center that the corporation has established for its employees, where it can make a difference. Let's start thinking in even broader terms, a parent's having opportunities for telecommuting, job-sharing, and an opportunity to understand, if we can send a person to the Moon, we ought to be as productive as we can be in corporate America --

(Applause.)

GENERAL RENO: -- while at the same time giving families time with children.

(Applause.)

GENERAL RENO: Let us make sure that those afternoon summertime hours, hours that children are not in school, when parents are not at home, that they have proper supervision.

The Carnegie Foundation has found that children are more at risk and alone and unsupervised than at any time in our history. Let's get together with corporate America and change that so our children have some place to go, and someone who loves them, and someone who supervises them.

We have seen enough shootings in the schools of America, on the streets of America by children who are alone and confused. Let us change it and bring us together again. Let us make sure that our schools have the resources necessary to do the job. I'm not going to get involved in district politics. I'm going to talk about the children of America. Something is wrong with a Nation that pays its football players in the six-digit figures and pays its teachers what we pay them.

(Applause.)

GENERAL RENO: And let us understand the beauty of counselors. I went to a party for a young lady last night who I've known all of her life, and her counselor was there, her counselor who had walked with her through high school and had made such a difference, and now we're trying to get elementary schools to have counselors across this country.

This is something that is so important. Let's form a partnership to see that it happens in 7 and 8, so that the children of those wards can grow up, let us make sure that all Americans can grow up with the supervision, the kindness, the shoulder to cry on, the person to talk to that can make the difference in their lives.

Let us make sure that we keep our children off the streets during school hours. We can figure out better ways to do that. Let us make sure that our children have the opportunity for service that is so important.

Let us understand, though, that there is a gap. In this city there will be a large number of people returning from Federal prisons to the streets of Washington who are young men who've been in trouble, who've gone to prison, who've paid the price.

You have your choice, Washington. They can come back without supervision to the apartment over the open-air drug market where they got into trouble in the first place, without an opportunity for a job, with people putting them

down because they have a prior record, and guess what? They're going to do it again.

It is time we come together, the church, private not-for-profits, police officers, who are good mentors, Government officials, Attorneys General, everybody come together to give these young people a chance to get off on the right foot.

I have a proposal for you. What if the judge is sentencing somebody and says, now, I'm going to assign you to this private not-for-profit group, or this corporation that is going to give you an opportunity to work after you get out of prison. You've got to do X, Y, and Z while you're in prison. When you get out, you're going to have to come back and report to me and keep off the bad side, and get on the good side with the duchess and everybody else.

(Applause.)

GENERAL RENO: And then, if they mess up bad, they go back to the prison. If they mess up just a little bit, somebody gives them a very firm talking to that doesn't put them down and doesn't demean them, but let's them know that they've done wrong.

But otherwise, there's somebody that's encouraging them. There is a business that is saying yes, I will hire you. I will give you a chance, and I expect the best of you.

We can turn it around, with police officers who are able to tell them what they need to get their voting rights restored. There's going to be so much that we can do if we don't give up on anybody, and I will tell you, those young men have so much to contribute. I've spent Martin Luther King day this past January working on a building in St. Louis. I went in there, and the television cameras followed me, and these young men looked at me like, hmm.

(Laughter.)

GENERAL RENO: When the television cameras left and I didn't

leave, they stopped going, hmm, but they were still perplexed as to why I was there. I said, give me something to do. Well, you want to nail this? And so I nailed three-penny nails into studs, and started putting -- and they decided I might know what I was doing.

(Laughter.)

GENERAL RENO: Then we started to talk. They want so to contribute, to make a difference. They want to understand. I said, well, why don't you talk to police officers. Oh, no. I'd be laughed at.

Start talking, start learning, and police officers start learning how to talk to these young people, and corporate America starts figuring out how you take the chance, and how you don't take the chance, and what we do to give every single Washingtonian a chance to contribute.

I have spent 7-1/2 years walking through this city, having people say, Janet, I want to talk to you, and they've got good ideas. I've walked across America, literally through cities of America. This is a wonderful Nation, with people who care so much.

Now, anybody that tells me, when I go home, that this isn't a city worth leading the greatest Nation in the world, that this isn't a welcoming city, I'm going to tell them they're flat-out wrong. The partnerships and feelings that are in this room, the partnerships and feelings that exist in this city, can make it the greatest city in the world in very short order.

(Applause.)

(Whereupon, at 10:33 a.m., the remarks ended.)