NATIONAL BLACK PROSECUTORS ASSOCIATION
17TH ANNUAL CONVENTION

Thursday, August 10, 2000

Loews L'Enfant Plaza Hotel
480 L'Enfant Plaza East, S.W.
Washington, D.C.

1:45 p.m.

STATEMENT OF HON. JANET RENO, ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Attorney General Reno: Thank you so much, Wilma. You have given me an awful lot to live up to.

It is just a pleasure to be around State prosecutors. I feel at home. And around Federal prosecutors, I am even beginning to feel at home there.

[Laughter.]

Attorney General Reno: I want you to know that on July 21st, I became eligible to retire from the Federal Government.

[Laughter.]

[Applause.]

Attorney General Reno: Mrs. Hall, Reverend and Mr. Hodge, I spoke to this group in 1993. They gave me one of my most cherished possessions, which I have seen much of lately because we are getting ready to move down the hall to the Solicitor General's Office as the Department of Justice

building is being renovated from stem to stern.

That Janet Reno doll --

[Laughter.]

[Applause.]

Attorney General Reno: -- I looked and my hair is grayer.

[Laughter.]

Attorney General Reno: There is less of it because I got it cut.

[Laughter.]

Attorney General Reno: There are -- my niece made me go get new glasses because she was tired of seeing those old ones on television.

[Laughter.]

Attorney General Reno: But the blue suit still goes to the State of the Union.

[Laughter.]

[Applause.]

Attorney General Reno: That little black baby is about eight or nine years old now. I think that baby is safer, but not safe enough. I think that baby is freer, but not free enough. I think that baby is healthy, healthier, but not healthy enough.

We have still got a lot to do. And all of us as prosecutors have a perfect forum and vantage point to do it in.

I only have about four or five months as a prosecutor, but just wait until I get out there and start giving you all

trouble from the sidelines.

[Laughter.]

Attorney General Reno: I think we have got to continue our role of problem solvers, of peacemakers, of protectors, of advocates. And we have got to do it ensuring that America is diverse.

My colleagues amongst the United States Attorneys who are represented here today have done so much to inform and to educate and to shove, push, cajole and sometimes fuss at us, to give us new dimension.

I still hear from my prosecutors at home who taught their colleagues how to pick juries because they did not understand, who taught them about how it was to be on a jury because they did not understand. They walked with me into Liberty Square, and they helped me communicate and reach out and understand better.

Just keep fussing, pushing, shoving, and picking up the phone and calling me to remind us all about how important diversity is. But then let us remember that we have much to do.

That baby is going to grow up. It will be 17 years from now, he will be 25 years old. What do we want? We want children who are never exposed to violence, children who grow in strong and positive ways, children who can perform with such beauty as these magnificent young people did here today.

How do we do that? When I got to Washington, everybody said, "She seems like a nice lady, but she sounds more like a social worker than a prosecutor."

Now, the Chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee asked to come speak to the Juvenile Justice Council and asked us to help him with his zero-to-three program for parenting. We have come a long way, but we have got far to go.

We have been able to take funds from the Department of Education, the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Justice and together, not as three stovepipes coming up in the city and in the nation, but together give grants for healthy children, save schools programs, to 50 or more cities and communities in the country.

We are making a difference. But we have got to make sure that these programs are woven together as we re-weave the fabric of community around children and families at risk.

And we should start a drumbeat that every child in this country should have proper preventative medical care when they come into this world, that every child in this country should have proper Educare --

[Applause.]

Attorney General Reno: -- not child care, but Educare, recognizing that those first three years of life are the most formative, and that 50 percent of all learned human responses learned in the first year of life and the concept of reward and punishment is developed in those first three years.

I cited those same figures to you in 1993. I have been citing them ever since, and nobody yet, not even the Wall Street Journal, has said I am wrong.

[Laughter.]

Attorney General Reno: Educare, programs for after school, programs for summertime, teachers' salaries that can attract the best teachers, time for teachers to teach --

[Applause.]

Attorney General Reno: -- domestic violence programs that interrupt the cycle of violence so that that child comes to learn that violence is not a part of his life and does not

have to be a part of his life, and programs that can help him cope with what he or she has seen, programs that get that kid back in school when he is out at 11:30 in the morning just drifting around, and back in school learning with something that can really attract him, not just something that bores him.

One of my favorite stories is of a school in Birmingham. I said, "What can we do about violence," to the students.

They said, "Oh, we have got the violence problem licked, Ms. Reno. We need computers."

[Laughter.]

Attorney General Reno: "And we need teachers who know how to teach us to use the computers."

Let us just keep building. Use your vantage point. Use the clout of your office to make sure that the children in your communities have the sources, the building blocks, to grow. They want so to be involved. They want so to make a difference. Let us give them that chance.

But let us recognize that with opportunity also comes accountability and that each of us must be accountable, but let us hold people accountable in fair ways that they can respect and understand and accept.

Let us impose punishment that is fair, firm and fits the crime. But let us do problem solving as we impose the punishment. For the person that breaks into the home and holds somebody at bay because they have a crack problem, let us make sure they understand there is no excuse for putting a gun up beside somebody's head and hurting them. But at the same time, let us try to correct the problem through treatment in prisons where we can make a difference, too.

But let us realize that there is still disparity. There is disparity in sentencing because other institutions have failed along the way, the schools, the neighborhood.

When a child comes to the juvenile court for the first time, the judge would like to put them in home detention. There is nobody at home capable of taking care of them. Immediately, the disparity starts. We have to figure a way to interrupt it at that point, and even earlier.

It makes no sense for us to wait until a child is 14 and we are considering home versus downtown detention, or we are considering affirmative action in universities and law schools. Let us make sure we provide affirmative action for all of America's children from the get-go where it counts.

[Applause.]

Attorney General Reno: Let us consider the child that is coming out of prison now at 25. Let us try to avoid that child ever being there in the first place. But if he is, let us make sure that he has some place to go rather than the apartment over the open-air drug market where he got into trouble in the first place.

[Applause.]

Attorney General Reno: Ladies and gentlemen, 500,000 people are coming out of our prisons each year for the next several years, 500,000 people a year from Federal and State prisons.

They are going right back, unless we develop re-entry programs that have the support of prosecutors, that give them some understanding that they will be held accountable, but that there are people there to support them along the way. We can truly make a difference in that regard.

But the prosecutor can be so instrumental. If you ever wonder whether you can really make a difference, I was at a loss at what to do in 1987 with crack-involved infants and their mothers.

I started looking at the whole subject, started looking at the number of crack cases I had on the calendar, started

looking at the sentences. Sentences, my eye. It was credit and time served because they could not get to it on the calendar because there were too many cases.

If they got to it, there was probation. The probation officer had 200 cases at any one time, and it was a hopeless situation. We developed a drug court with two absolute conditions to it: One, do not spread yourself too thin. Make sure you have enough resources to properly treat the caseload, and make sure the caseload is small enough so that the judge can individually look at people and treat them as human beings who have a problem and a problem that can be corrected if only we work with them in the right way and hold them accountable and give them opportunity.

Ten years later, I went back as Attorney General. There had been five of us really active in putting together the drug court. There were over 1,000 people in the room, in a drug court conference. There were over 200 drug courts in action across the country with 300 more on the drawing boards. It has improved since then.

You can make a difference using the power of your offices and the work that you do on your individual calendars.

But let us look at what we do. Courts can make a difference, but all of you have probably seen the same courts I have, courts that are totally overwhelmed, courts that just see a rush of human beings come to them because other institutions have failed. And then the courts, with caseloads that they cannot begin to manage, try their very best but make mistakes along the way, or have no resources with which to solve the problem.

Guess what? The community gets mad at that judge for doing that, for letting that person out and not doing enough about it because he committed another crime. He committed another crime not because that judge was not trying his best, most times. He committed that crime because we were spread too thin.

Ladies and gentlemen, I think courts with good and caring

judges and adequate resources can make a difference. And I would like to join with you in trying to establish in this country model courts for juveniles, for child abuse and neglect, for domestic violence, for re-entry programs, for mental health.

And I think if we have courts with small enough caseloads, we can show the people that courts can work, and we can save money in the long-run because we can stop the revolving door that happens because we are going it a lick and a split here and there. Let us work together.

[Applause.]

Attorney General Reno: Another area where we can make a difference, you all especially can make a difference, is in letting the people of the United States know that there are some great and caring and wonderful police officers who are dedicated to problem solving, to peacemaking, to mentoring young men and young women, to doing so much for the people of their communities.

And then there are some bad ones, and then there are some ones that do not mean to be bad, but they do not know any better.

[Laughter.]

Attorney General Reno: You have seen the difference, "What do you want? Where do you think you are going? Come here."

[Laughter.]

Attorney General Reno: "Hey, there. How are you doing this evening? I want to talk to you a little bit if I might. Oh, you are over here for the baseball game. What position do you play?" They work it out. It is tone of voice, body language, the way you approach somebody.

I try to talk to people who have been in trouble, or who are in trouble now, and ask them what could have made a difference. "Somebody to talk to me, somebody who

understands how hard it is to grow up in this country today, somebody who can give me a pat on the back when I deserve it, and give me a figurative kick in the pats when I need some discipline."

[Laughter.]

Attorney General Reno: A good police officer can be such a force for good. Let us join forces together to support policing as it is done best, and to try to work with other groups to change policing as it is not done well.

[Applause.]

Attorney General Reno: But as we talk about communities and as we talk about individuals, something comes to us in these seven years that has changed the face of criminal justice and changed the face of the world.

It has meant that boundaries are meaningless in some instances and it is a technology that, as Adlai Stevenson might have said, as he said of his nomination, "staggers the imagination and converts vanity to prayer."

When we see a man sit in a kitchen in St. Petersburg, Russia and steal from a bank in New York, when we see somebody stalk another halfway around the world, when we see what the Internet can do, we have work to do.

We have work to do to preserve a marvelous phenomena, something that can add to the communication, add to the education, the sense of discovery, bringing us together; or it can invade our privacy, split us apart, terrorize us, and become a tool of terror. Law enforcement has a special role.

And I would just like to leave you with ten points which might seem somewhat inconsistent with talks about community.

But, ladies and gentlemen, unless all of us, attorneys general and prosecutors and preachers and everybody else master cybertalk and understand the technology sufficient

to make sure that human beings are the boss of the technology rather than the technology bossing us, we are going to be in trouble. And prosecutors are going to have to learn and respond quickly.

We are going to have to establish a 24-hour-a-day, 7-day-a-week capacity to respond to other agencies around the world so that when there is an intrusion traced back to Washington, D.C., we can give to the police in Madrid the latest information and start tracing with them, to show that it may not have come from Washington, D.C., but show where it came from so that we can take action to hold those people responsible.

We have to establish a secure, on-line clearinghouse of the latest technology and how to, and what to do, and "What do you do about this? And how do you get around this? And how do you do this? And what is the law on this? And how can you respond here?"

We have to share expertise and training. We cannot hire enough people because there are not enough people that are willing to sacrifice enough to go into public service, considering the salaries that people can get if they are --

[Laughter.]

Attorney General Reno: -- a lot more technologically advanced that I am.

We all do not have to have the expert or the piece of equipment that is vital. We can share it. And I envision a country where the State forensic labs, local forensic labs, prosecutors, Federal and State, share together.

A certain part of Florida might not need the XYZ machine that has just been developed that is the latest, state-of-the-art that costs millions. Florida can share that with the rest of the Southeast. And then we can tap into Quantico and we can share it on a national, regional and local basis.

But we have to make sure that we cover this nation. We have to share equipment and technology. We have to develop regional forensic labs and forensic standards.

I am still getting questions from people, "How do I get this computer searched? It has been out there for six months. Nobody has gotten to it. There is a backlog. What are we going to do?"

We have to work together to develop legal solutions. What happens to the prosecutor in Virginia who has a subpoena or a search warrant for a computer or for some computer-related materials, and the computer happens to be in Virginia, but the data in Virginia is stored in California? How does the Virginia subpoena or search warrant get to California?

Or what about the Frenchman who is being investigated by the French authorities who want to search his computer and he is a customer of American Online, and America Online's stuff is stored at Dallas -- at Dulles? How do we deal with those issues?

How do we work together around the world? How do I help you, and the Justice Department after I leave, help you make the links with the rest of the world? If you have gotten somebody that is trying to cause your bank problems, who is sitting in Athens, Greece, how do we work with Athens' authorities to get you what you need quickly to do the job, to get that person prosecuted?

But what if that person has fled to Mexico where he is a Mexican national, and they do not want to extradite? We have to work together to make sure that there is no safe place to hide anywhere in this world for dangerous, sophisticated criminals, and that we develop international treaties and understandings that are based on trust and on that concept.

We have to develop new ways of bringing people to trial through closed-circuit TV processes and other features that ensure due process, but make sure that the costs and the

burdens of extradition do not prevent justice from being done.

And we have to worry about the money issues. How do we do this? How do we find the prosecutors? How do we find the equipment and the expertise? If we share together, we can make a big difference.

An issue that is truly important to me is privacy. Privacy advocates do not trust us very much. They sure have fussed at me a lot.

[Laughter.]

Attorney General Reno: And they like to forget that I have a court order when I undertake electronic surveillance. But it makes it more incumbent upon us if we are going to build partnerships, that we build partnerships with people who understand what we are about. So it is going to take explaining and understanding and outreach.

And finally, we are going to have to teach ethics on the Internet. As somebody pointed out, his 13-year-old daughter knew not to read other people's mail, not to go into somebody else's room when they told her not to. They had taught her concepts of ethics and privacy and courtesy. But she did not know what to do on a chatroom. She did not know what to do about other people's emails. We have to teach ethics on the Internet.

He is 8 now. He will be 15 before we know it. And then he will be 25, and have a baby about a year old. And I hope that all of us with the talent, the public spirit, the caring that is in this room have been effective, and that that little boy of 1993 will be a father with a little boy at 25 that has the whole world in his hand, in terms of opportunity, in terms of safety, in terms of health, and in terms of freedom.

In the last seven years, one of the great opportunities for me has been to welcome the ministers of justice from around the world, but particularly the emerging democracies of

Eastern Europe, democracies coming out from under tyranny in Chile, to go to South Africa to see President Mbeki sworn in.

Somebody said, "You should have been here for the first inauguration."

I said, "Oh, no. When the first president transfers power to the second president in a free and democratic and peaceful election, that is the greatest inauguration to come to of all." And it was a day I will never forget.

But as I met with their ministers, you see the problems of building a diverse and strong democracy, more than ever before. You see it in the eyes of the ministers who express frustration and sometimes failure. And you realize more than ever before that democracy is a fragile institution. We must cherish it. We must never take it for granted.

You are the voice of your government, more so than any other institution, other than policing. It is on your voice, on our voice that democracy will soar and succeed, or fail. I have absolutely no doubts but that it will succeed. God bless you all.

[Applause.]

[Whereupon, at 2:20 p.m., the speech was concluded.]