



REMARKS OF
ATTORNEY GENERAL JANET RENO
BEFORE THE
INDIAN SELF-DETERMINATION SUMMIT
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GRAND BALLROOM, MONARCH HOTEL
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P R O C E E D I N G S

Introductory Speaker: It is my great honor to introduce and welcome the Attorney General to the summit that we have all worked so hard to do. The summit, as you know, Madame Attorney General, is the Indian self-determination summit on tribal strategies to reduce alcohol, substance abuse and violence. We are very happy that you joined us here.

I'd like to start your introduction by saying thank you. I'm very honored to greet you and introduce you this morning. About five years ago you hosted the first of about four or five listening conferences throughout Indian country. And you came to the Pueblo Hamus and we did a village meeting at the Pueblo Hamus and you were joined by several of your federal partners.

Nearly the entire pueblo was there that was living resident in the community including my father and mother, Joy and Juan Ahacos. They're joined today by my other parents who have taught me how to love their son who they raised Isabelle and Louis Melton and all of the people from across the country who went and heard you speak to us about your commitment. And you've brought great news to us about all the things that Indian people have to look forward to while you were in office.

We have been able to witness the commitment and the hard

work that you have provided for us. Since that time that you were in Hamus, the people of my community know you as the bearer of hope, and I've told you this before a couple of times, and you have shown us and we have been very grateful for all of the things that you have done. In this time, we know that you only have about four more months here, we are all here, my parents are here, I brought them here, they greeted you as you started, they're here to pray with you and pray for you so that you will have all of the strength that you've been showing us will just multiply in the last four months that you are here.

Ladies and gentleman, Madame Attorney General -- this is the first woman Attorney General of the United States. In her career she has focused her energies on combatting and reducing crime and violence by incarcerating serious repeat offenders, focusing much of her energy on early intervention to keep children from being harmed, to help children who are in trouble or who are troubled. She's gained much of her own personal experience and knowledge as a prosecutor for Dade county in Florida, that's where she first met many of the Indian Nations from that community because her mother also worked among the Indian people.

She has focused attention on prevention to enable children to grow up in a safe constructive environment. She has helped to reform the juvenile justice system and pursued delinquent fathers for child support payments. Ms. Reno also has helped to establish many of the drug courts that are across the country and especially the one in Miami. These are all, and some, a few of the accomplishments that she has conducted. At this time, I'd like to welcome Ms. Reno to the podium.

Ms. Reno: Thank you so much. It is a privilege and an honor for me to be here today with you. We come to see what we can do together to reduce alcohol abuse, substance abuse and violence in the Indian country. Some people say that that can't be done. But people said we couldn't reduce violence in America. And it's now down eight years in a row, because people came together, they focused not just on punishment but on prevention. They worked not to get credit, but to help make America safer and freer. We can

become complacent overall in this nation and we'll watch the crime rate go back up, but if we address the issue in a thoughtful bipartisan way, recognizing that these problems are not a Republican or a Democratic, they are a problem of the people and the people must come together to solve them.

Today, there are over 400 tribal leaders and practitioners representing a hundred different Indian tribes from the high school flame keepers of Cherokee North Carolina to my friends from Kinez Pueblo and to the Sitka tribe of Alaska.

What Ada didn't tell you, and she has been a good friend and a good advisor, is that the young people from the pueblo took a relay race across the country one leg after another to come visit me in the conference room in the Department of Justice seeking further efforts on the part of the federal government to honor their elders, to give hope to their young people, and it is the spirit of those young people that is with us today.

They are an example of the fact that we can do anything we really want to if we put our mind to it, and if we accept some very firm principles. First of all, the first principle is the federal government is far more effective when its different departments work together, and today, this summit is being sponsored by five federal departments, Housing and Urban Development, Health and Human Services, Interior, Transportation, and Justice. When you bring them together so that you don't have to go from one to the next to the next, we can be much more effective.

In addition, the White House office of national drug control policy and from the Senate committee on Indian affairs are also participating. Throughout the federal government, there are programs designed to address alcohol and substance abuse, the BIA, HHS, HUD and DOJ all have them. Let's make sure that we collaborate and cooperate in putting these programs into effect so that we don't engage in costly duplication, so that we're not redundant in our efforts, and so that we evaluate our programs to see what's working and what's not working and make a difference.

We have an ongoing dialogue with the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Indian Health Service concerning alcohol and substance abuse and violence. We are currently working on demonstration efforts to address alcohol abuse in Indian country. The office of juvenile justice and delinquency prevention is working cooperatively on a circle of peer project with HHS' substance abuse and mental health services administration. On January the 7th of 1999 the White House announced the tribal youth and mental health and community safety project.

Again, a collaborative effort by Education, HHS, Interior and Justice to address tribal youth needs in the home, the school, the community, and in the justice systems. We hope that this model project which brings the forces of government together in a constructive effort will be the way we deal with issues for the future.

The Department of Justice is also seeking to include Indian tribes' general programs to break the cycle of substance abuse and violent crime. For example, 15 Indian tribes received under the drug free community support program funded by ONDCP and administered by the office of juvenile justice and delinquency prevention. The program will require again collaboration within the community, government agencies, nonprofit groups, and service providers to prevent the use of drugs and their abuse by young people.

Ada has mentioned the drug court program. We're trying to make sure that that program is shared throughout Indian country. It operates on the good old carrot and stick approach, let us give you an opportunity, let us give you good resources to address the problem, and then let us expect that if you don't accept these opportunities, you will be held accountable in an appropriate way.

One of the most encouraging things to me, I kept asking what is being done, what is the latest research, what is working, what is not working in Indian country, and last December I met with representatives of Interior, HUD, IHS, and Sampson and Dr. Phil May of the University of New Mexico. I asked, how could the Department of Justice

address this problem. What can we do, how can we work together? It was very interesting. And it was at this point that I believed we could make a difference.

One of Dr. May's answers was to help share the most current research information and lessons being learned in Indian country. Help find and discuss the programs that are working in Indian country. Create a forum for tribal leaders and practitioners to talk about what works and what does not work.

In response to this answer, the Department of Justice in cooperation with the national crime prevention council, BIA and the Indian Health Service held a conference in Seattle in March of this year called alcohol and crime research and practice for prevention. Today's summit is a product of that meeting. Tribal leaders and others from Indian country as well as experts in the field of alcohol and substance abuse have come together today to discuss promising practices for addressing these problems in Indian country. And that leads to the second principle.

If the federal government is working together, that's good, but it won't be very effective unless it listens. I started those listening conferences a long time ago, it seems a long time ago now, it's only about six short years ago. I have learned so much from you. I have learned of your traditions, of your heritage, of your common sense, of the good ways you approach issues. I've learned, "Madame Attorney General, why do you persist upon assigning just guilt or innocence? It's not just black or white, there are gray areas and you've got to find out what caused the problem in the first place and solve that." And we've tried to do much more in terms of problem solving and peacemaking as a result of listening to tribal leaders and young people across this country.

The third principle is ours is a government to government relationship. On May 14th, 1998, President Clinton reaffirmed fundamental principles of tribal sovereignty when he issued the executive order on consultation and coordination with Indian tribal governments which states: Since the formation of the Union, the United States has

recognized Indian tribes as domestic dependent nations under its protection.

In treaties our nation has guaranteed the right of Indian tribes to self-government, as domestic dependent nations Indian tribes exercise inherent sovereign powers over their members and government. The United States continues to work with Indian tribes on a government to government basis to address issues concerning Indian tribal self-government, resources and Indian tribal treaty and other rights. That means we are here today to listen and to learn.

Tribal programs and strategies will be showcased during the breakout session. These sessions will be moderated by elected tribal leaders. Dr. Phil May and Maria Braveheart will share with us the most current research. A tribal forum will be held with the Senate, and a tribal leaders roundtable will be held with Assistant Secretary Kevin Goder, Lynn Cutler, assistant to the White House chief of staff and General McCaffrey of the office of national drug control policy will share with you the efforts of the White House to support the efforts of tribal governments to address alcohol and substance abuse.

In addition, sometimes things don't get timed right, but it's really good when you can produce something that is hopefully worthwhile and useful. I'm pleased to share with you today this publication which is promising practices and strategies to reduce alcohol and substance abuse among American Indians and Alaska natives.

I trust that everyone will get one today and what I would like to know is how you feel this addresses the problem and what more we can do to provide this information to you on websites, in other forms, how it can be most useful to you, what more do you need to know about it? What can we learn that will be helpful to you? Because it is your self-determination that is so important to do it in accordance with tribal principles, tribal heritage, and how then, our question becomes, do we provide the resources consistent with our trust responsibility to meet the needs.

It becomes extremely important because reservation Indian populations are growing rapidly. And while the average age of the general population is about 34, the average age on many of the large western Indian reservations is about 18. Many tribes continue to report very severe poverty and resource shortages while the Indian Health Service has some funding for alcohol abuse treatment, it is far short of what is necessary to deal with the significant and growing problem of alcohol abuse and alcohol-related violence.

For fiscal year 2001, as part of Indian country law enforcement improvement initiatives, the Department of Justice has requested funding to address the correlation between alcohol, substance abuse and violence. We've requested 10 million dollars for an Indian drug testing and treatment program, eight million dollars for alcohol and substance abuse diversion programs, and eight million dollars for tribal youth mental health and behavioral problems initiative.

One of the most difficult issues to deal with in substance abuse, treatment, or in alcohol abuse treatment is the dual diagnosis of mental health problems that go with substance abuse and the more we can focus on that, learning again from you, the more I think we're going to be effective in dealing with this effort.

I'd like to describe a little of what we envision from these budget requests. With the testing and treatment program, it is a part of the OJP request for the zero tolerance and drug intervention initiative. That program would provide for drug testing to offenders and for mandatory treatment for substance abusers who are in custody. Hasn't it ever bothered you to see somebody in a jail, where they belong because they've committed a serious crime, but to know they have an alcohol or drug abuse problem and watch it not be treated where you have a perfectly good facility for treating them, let's make sure we use our facilities and our resources as wisely as possible.

Drug testing is an important tool for criminal justice agencies to control drug abuse among inmates. Combined with

effective intervention such as meaningful graduated sanctions, drug testing can curtail drug use within the criminal justice population. Drug dependent individuals who receive comprehensive treatment will decrease their drug use, decrease their criminal behavior, increase employment and increase interpersonal functioning.

The coercion of the criminal justice system can be a useful tool. Studies show substance abusers who are required to enter such programs are just as likely to succeed as those who voluntarily enter treatment. Such intervention should have the effect of significantly reducing drug abuse in criminal behavior after release.

As a complement to the testing and treatment program, the department is requesting eight million dollars for alcohol and substance abuse diversion programs. Tribal probation and criminal justice systems have very few services available for court mandated diversion programs.

We see young people there pleading for treatment and there is very little. This program would provide resources for diversion programs to prevent and reduce violent crime, it would also allow tribal law enforcement agencies to deal more effectively with repeat alcohol offenders and refocus other tribal law enforcement resources on the most violent offenders.

The next program is the mental health and behavioral problem commission. Indian juveniles in the criminal justice system are more likely than others to have mental health or emotional problems. In 1998 BKS reported that detained Indian youth were significantly more likely than the nondetained counterparts to have a diagnoseable substance abuse dependence or other conduct disorder. In addition, federal and tribal law enforcement officials have found that in the absence of early intervention minor offenders simply escalate to further and more serious crime unless there is an effective intervention.

All these programs can make a difference if we learn today how we can best implement them and what they can do in your

communities. We will continue to coordinate in every way that we can. So I hope that this summit will accomplish three things, strengthen our federal-tribal partnership, create a forum for tribal leaders to discuss and develop recommendations for a national agenda, and finally provide you access to the latest research and information that you may take home to assist you in creating or enhancing your strategy for tribal and community success.

But I would like to talk to you a minute and turn the tables on you and ask that you hear my perspective of Indian country of the last seven and a half years. I have been to the pueblo, I have been to the north Shayan reservation, I have been to pow-wows, I have stood in lecture halls at Harvard Law School, and I have heard the strength and the wisdom of Indian country handed down from generation to generation. I have seen some people who look and sound defeated. But then I have seen the young people from the pueblo run all the way across the country because they had hope and they believed in the future of the Indian country.

I asked Dr. May how do you take the spirit, the regard for the air, the land, and the water, for those vast spaces of the west, for the forest to the northeast, how do you take the traditions of each tribe, all a little bit different than the other, and recreate that spirit today in a force that will enable a pueblo, a tribe, a nation to come together and address the problem. You have proven to me that you can come together, that you can evoke the spirit of people who have lived on this land for far longer than we can imagine.

I ask you today to talk among yourselves about how you develop leaders that believe in their past and know how to transpose it to the future. How they can be creative with the modern wonders of the Internet in enabling people to remain on their land while at the same time developing economic opportunities. How we can use the tremendous problem solving and peacemaking skills handed down from one generation to another to solve this problem that affects your youth and your land and your tribe and your pueblo.

I will tell you that after seven years I have absolutely no doubts that you can do it. I have faith in Indian country and in American Indians to recreate a world in which the spirit of the people stand for what's right, speak for what's right, and then see that what's right is done.

Believe in yourselves, believe in what can be done, and then if you see a little red truck coming across the mountain and up the little winding rode to the pueblo and she looks lost, the lady driving the truck, come out and wave her over and say hey it's this way. I'm going to get in my little red truck and drive across this nation to places I have never been and to places that I have been before but that I could not stay long enough, and many of the places that I will go are in Indian country because much of the strength of this nation, much of the appreciation for all that is wonderful in this nation lies in Indian country. Let us go forth today and harness that spirit for the good of the young people to come. Thank you.

Audience Member: My name is Eugene Arnette of Fresno, California. Within California we're having problems with the 280, the 280 law, which means the law enforcement they don't understand it, where the Indians we're kind of caught in limbo. And it's creating havoc on the West Coast.

Ms. Reno: Sir, I think I get a 280 question at almost every meeting and I come back and I don't always have the answers, but let me check and see just what we're doing, what the latest is on this issue, and if I could ask you to give a number to one of my staff members who will come up to you, I'll get back to you and try to give you the best answer I can based on what we're doing now and what we've been able to do.

Audience Member: Janet Reno, my name's Jack Mesak, tribal chairman for the Washoe Reservation down in San Diego, California. I'd like to take this time and opportunity to thank you for coming out to meet with the Indian people today. I know we have a big problem in California on substance abuse but I know I'm in good faith and good faith with you that we're going to try to stop it in California. I know we're doing our best in California to prevent

alcohol and drug abuse. So thank you for being here. And it's an honor to meet you.

Ms. Reno: Thank you.

Audience Member: My name is Dennis Monsignor, I'm the vice chairman of Shoshone tribes of Death Valley and Awahee Nevada. First of all I'd like to on behalf of all the Indians, the brothers and sisters throughout Indian country, we'd like for you to take a message back to President Clinton and let him know on behalf of the Indians that we really appreciate what he's done for us over the eight years.

Ms. Reno: I will do that, sir.

Audience Member: I had an opportunity to shake his hand a while back and he's very concerned about the problems we that are happening in Indian country. It's very inspiring to listen to your message, but it's kind of discouraging when we hear that sometimes in Indian country we do look defeated. Madame let me tell you something, we will never be defeated.

Ms. Reno: Right on.

Audience Member: Never. Sometimes it's very frustrating because there are things we want to do but we can't do it because we deal with the federal government sometimes that do not stand up to their treaty obligations, and those treaty obligations say they have a trust responsibility. And it's too bad that sometimes they don't hold up their obligations no matter what it is whether it's in the field of education, whether it's in the field of Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, or whether it's in the field of Indian Health Service. But we go on we go on we go on, we will never ever quit.

I guess my question to you Ms. Reno is, how much money are you talking about putting into the budgets in Indian country because I was reading in the Idaho Statesman's back in Boise, Idaho about three weeks ago where it says that

the states could get up to 65 million dollars and we're wondering how much are you guys going to put into the budget into law enforcement in Indian country and how will that be divided up.

Ms. Reno: The appropriator is Congress so that will be the ultimate answer as to what Congress puts in and we will learn I think within this next month as to what we can precisely expect. With respect to the overall funding, I will give you the latest version if you will give me a telephone number where I can reach you and I'll send you a copy of the relevant portions.

Audience Member: I certainly would appreciate that. And how long are we looking at before we can expect to get that? Because see, the Department of Justice, you know, there was a lot of discussion amongst the tribal leaders and they talked about getting us involved in the Department of Justice, some of us were very wary to go in that direction, but money is what drives this country.

Ms. Reno: Can I make a suggestion to you? There is one thing that drives this country more than money, and that is the character and the spirit of the people. And that's what's going to drive us ultimately. And then to use the money in the wisest way possible to show Congress that a program works, then multiply that program.

Let me give you an example, we established the drug court, the first drug court in Miami, people looked at us and said why will it work? Because we cared, and we made it work, and we had it evaluated, and we were able to take it to Congress and show that if you can multiply this through Indian country it can work it takes us all working together to get the job done.

Audience Member: Exactly.

Ms. Reno: So let me get this gentleman behind you, his question answered, and then let me turn it over.

Audience Member: Again, thank you for what you've done for

us too. God bless.

Ms. Reno: Well, don't thank me until I finish.

Audience Member: Ms. Reno, my name is Jack Sloan. I'm chairman of the nation in Utah and North Dakota. I just have a brief question Janet. First of all, I'd like to thank you as well as my colleague has just stated thank you for your seven wonderful years for helping Indian country in this great country of ours.

But my question is briefly what advice can you give Indian country, Janet, as being the Attorney General where many of our tribes are now asserting our rights in terms of return of lakeshore lands and all the federal dams have put in, excess lands, tribes are having trouble getting those lands returned, tribals are having trouble getting water compacts completed and also when you talk about the airspace and you talk about the great digital divide, tribes are asserting themselves trying to get their airspace determined.

But we're afraid of the Supreme Court. What advice can you give Indian country, Ms. Reno, in terms of how we can retain our land base, our water rights and our airspace in light of many times negative Supreme Court decisions.

Ms. Reno: Just keep in close touch with the Solicitor General, I can't get into politics because attorney generals are supposed to stay out of politics.

Audience Member: I won't say nothing if you do.

Ms. Reno: The Supreme Court's decision depends on who's on the Supreme Court.

Audience Member: Thank you.

(Conclusion of Attorney General Reno's remarks.)