# CHEMICAL PRECURSOR COMMITTEE

## THE NATIONAL METHAMPHETAMINE CHEMICAL INITIATIVE

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**September 13th, 2000**

**10:10 a.m.**

**Omni Hotel**

**100 CNN Center**

**Atlanta, Georgia**

MS. JANET RENO: I thank you, Laura, for those kind words, but it is all of you in the field that make our efforts possible. I discovered sometimes, I think, that it is easier to go to Washington and think big ideas and ask questions, forgetting how hard it is to deal with the circumstances in the field, bringing people together, getting things done. I just want you to know how much I admire you.

I have seen firsthand what you are doing now across the nation, not just in the west. You are making a difference, and I would like to use your experience to see what we could do in a comprehensive way to deal with the problem of meth throughout the nation.

I still remember as a prosecutor in 1984 wondering what this stuff was. People said it was cocaine, but it was different. Then the medical examiner started coming in saying this stuff is really bad. We did not quite know what to call it, and then crack emerged.

Miami was one of the first places it came. We did not know. We were not prepared. We were overwhelmed. Our hospitals were overwhelmed and our neighborhoods were destroyed in many instances. I want to take that experience, take what you have done, and see what we could do to be proactive and problem-solving and stop this before it really gets the same foothold throughout the nation as crack did in the ensuing ten years after 1984.
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Today's homegrown methamphetamine poses a great threat to the communities, threatening to follow in yesterday's crack epidemic. In some communities, it already has, but meth is not just a problem for west of the Mississippi. It is often associated with violent and erratic behavior, and its chronic use leads to destructive addiction that causes the user to forgo everything else just to have this drug.

It has a different quality than crack. Doctors tell me, law enforcement officials tell me it is more insidious than crack because you can function in a job longer, you could function in a normal setting longer than you could with crack. You could keep your life together, but the violence is there. The disintegration is there, and it makes it more difficult to cope because of the ability to function.

In addition to the human terms and the human toll that it takes, meth labs pose a very serious threat to the welfare of children who are in them and those who live or work nearby. Exposure to the chemicals used in manufacturing meth can cause severe illnesses and chronic health problems, even death, because children develop faster than adults, they are more affected by harmful chemicals in their environment and they will experience double or triple the effect from exposure than adults.

An increasing number of children have also been hospitalized for poisoning as a result of consuming meth ingredients because the chemicals are often stored in food container where young children have access to them. While the debilitating health consequences of meth exposure to children cannot be underestimated, the psychological development and the social consequences are grave for children living in and exposed to meth.

You have banded together to meet this threat head on. You are on the front line, and I look forward to hearing from some of you what I can do in the four months I have remaining as Attorney General to give you support where you need it and in the most efficient way I can.

The initiative and resourcefulness you have shown is in the finest tradition of law enforcement, working as problem-solvers for difficult and dangerous threats in our community, but you can't do it alone.

Today's law enforcement recognizes that it takes a community to raise us up from the problems of crime, addiction, and it takes a community to help break the culture of violence that can accompany these problems.

We have seen crime go down eight years in a row. I keep waiting for it to start up again because it always did, but for the first time in my life I have a real feeling that we can work together, identify problems before they become significant problems for this nation, and take steps to solve the problems and thus continue to reduce crime, and once and for all end the culture of violence in the country.

Let me give you two figures, two cities, Chicago and Toronto, somewhat similar in size. From 1992 to 1996, Toronto had 100 gun homicides. Chicago had 3,060. We do not have to be violent in this nation if we take issues such as meth and work together to solve these problems. We must think across disciplinary lines. A goods traditional beat cop knows there is much to learn from the teacher, the doctor, and the priest that will aid in enforcing the law.

We must continue this practice in an institutionalized way by responding across the board to threats against our community. It is no coincidence that the leadership from this conference is from San Diego. The San Diego methamphetamine strike force was just a vanguard reaching into the community to build huge multi-discipline relationships to impact the meth problem.

In San Diego, the traditional circle of prosecutors and law enforcement agencies creatively expanded to include committee leaders, health and treatment officials, and media campaign specialists who really raise community awareness.

While it is too soon to say with certainty that this comprehensive approach has turned the tide of meth abuse in San Diego, early indicators seem to indicate that it is working there, that there has been a 22-percent drop in meth use among male arrestees in San Diego in the past year.

What we are still seeing, though, is the movement of meth as it sweeps across the country and tries to gain a foothold in unsuspecting cities. For example, labs more than doubled in Tulsa, Oklahoma, from 162 in 1998 to 396 at the end of 1999; and now they are moving into such places as the Shenandoah Valley in Virginia.

I would like to talk to you about what we could do looking to the future with three points in minds. How will we create a sense across America in law enforcement, the private sector, the churches, schools, the medical community, everyone involved including the industry that manufacturers the chemicals that contribute? What can we do to deal with it coactively, identify it early, and take comprehensive steps to do something about it? What can the American communities do?

The second is, how can we collectively in law enforcement improve our intelligence-gathering capacity? With automation today we have unparalleled opportunities to develop databases and with the knowledge that we have on how to train intelligence analysts, we can do so much if we have got the technology and if we have got the know-how to bring all this vast data together and put it in the form that you can use it easily and effectively in your community.

The third thing is somewhat the same but not in terms of law enforcement. How do we exchange information? How do we develop the capacity to say, look, this city has done a really innovative thing in meth lab cleanup? Here is how it is done. This is a new development in the treatment of meth abuse. This is how it is done.

How do we exchange information on a national basis that gives us an opportunity to know what works and what does not work? What should be discarded and what can be enhanced? How could we improve it? Today I would like to talk to you about a new effort to build community coalitions.

I recently challenged approximately eight cities to become model meth cities. I couldn't promise them money because I can't tell yet what Congress is going to do with the appropriations process, but I promised them technical assistance and the best we could give them in terms of suggestions as to what could be done.

I promised them that we would be the best partner possible in addressing the issue of how we build a local coalition to attack meth in their community and their neighborhoods. These coalitions are now beginning to take root in these cities. Criminal law enforcement efforts are linking the community with corrections-based programs that provide drug testing, treatments and detoxification services.

Each of the cities will forge new working relationships with the US Attorney's office, the local DA's community leaders, treatment experts, school professionals, health officials, the faith community, local industry partners, and the media.

Each of cities will have to identify precisely what their meth problem is. Is it Mexican traffickers? Is it a mom-and-pop lab? Who is it? How did it get started? What direction is it going in?

Each of these cities will have to determine what their treatment capacity is, both generally and for meth specifically. Then each city will map out a prevention education treatment and enforcement plan that fits what that community's meth problem is.

One of the efforts that will be explored, because there is money for it, is the addition of drug courts. I remember in 1988 we didn't know what to do about the first offender who had never reached the court's calendar because the court was overwhelmed with too many other cases.

This was a small crack case. We developed the drug court operating out of the good old fashioned carrot-and-stick approach that said something is going to happen to you if you don't work with us in terms of treatment, in terms of job training, in terms of placement; but if you do, we are going to help you get off on the right foot.

But it is not just going to be a six-month program. It is going to be as long as it takes to get you to a place that you can effectively test drug free for a consistent period of time, but there was a difference in the drug court with other courts. The case load was small enough for the judge to manager it and to know who was before him and what to expect.

It was provided with sufficient resources to match the needs of the people in the program and we carefully control the case load so that it was not spread too thin. Courts can be powerful forces for change if they have got the resources and small enough case loads to make a difference, if the judge knows what he or she is doing and is committed to the efforts.

We now have, after evaluating these programs to see whether they work, we now have over 400 drug courts in effect across the nation, but we should have drug courts specifically designed to deal with the meth problem and specifically equipped to do it.

One of the things I would like to do is reach out to HHS, which is the Department of Health and Human Services, and do everything we can to develop webpages and lines of communications so that every community in this country can find out what the latest developments in meth treatment are, what is working and not working, and exchange that on a current on-line basis.

Drug courts traditionally have been for those who are first offenders charged with possession of a small amount of the substance. The concept of the drug court can work as effectively for a person who is in prison having participated in a lab but also having an abuse problem.

It makes no sense to send that person to prison for five years and have them return to the community without having done anything to address the problem while he is in prison and to enable him to return to the community. We could have the type of drug court again with the carrot-and-stick approach saying you could come back to the community if you test drug-free on a consistent basis for a long period of time.

We can do so much if we manage reasonably, instead of expecting the impossible, from all of those who are engaged in this effort. Now, one of the things that was established in California early on was the recognition that as crack really had a terrible impact on the lives of children, methamphetamines were having a terrible impact on children who were found in labs, the dangers I have just described previously. What could we do?

California took the lead and developed units composed of child protection teams, law enforcement, the medical community, schools, the courts, and just think of what you could do if you have a judge in a dependency program who understands what crack, what meth can do to children, and follows the case carefully ensuring adequate resources and ensuring that he has a case load that he could manage.

Again, courts can be a powerful force in this if we give them half a chance to do their job. There is a tendency on the part of law enforcement sometimes to knock the courts, but consider for a moment that courts have not grown in the same measures and at the same rates as law enforcement has grown with the crime problem as it has developed over the last 25 years.

So the courts were totally overwhelmed, and if they were overwhelmed, they lost the public credibility because they couldn't manage and couldn't be expected to manage. Now these courts, if we control the case load sufficiently, can really do something that stops the revolving door.

As we observed, though, there are other steps that have got to be taken. One of the initiatives I have seen recently up close that has impressed me most is Operation Mountain Express. We must take blessings from that whole initiative and strengthen our chemical diversion efforts to move the illicit supply of chemicals vital to the production of meth.

When we link the burden to purchase chemicals, like pseudoephedrine found at the lab sites to a chemical supplier, and notify that supplier that their chemicals had been used in the manufacturer of meth, we need the tracking in place for swift and certain follow-up to ensure that suspicious chemical sales have ended.

For those chemical suppliers who knowingly continue to profit from meth, we must step up our response by combining a full range of criminal, civil and administrative sanctions such as we did in Mountain Express. There, the unprecedented administrative actions to simultaneously revoke the chemical right's status of 20 distributors led another 30 chemical analysts to abandon their registration rather than to face government scrutiny.

I salute you for your work in this effort, but we got to do more. We have got to reach out to legitimate industry on a consistent comprehensive basis in this nation and encourage voluntary initiative on the part of the industry to work with us. I have spoken with Laura, and I want to do everything I can, as you identify priorities in this conference, to add my support to those efforts.

We have had an interesting experience not so long ago meeting with various industries that do considerable business in Latin America showing what could be done if they examine their processes and their initiatives to see how we could deal together with money laundering in the black market pesos exchange.

If we reach out to the private sector, the legitimate private sector, and encourage voluntary support for our efforts, you get so much down the line, and then at first they look at you and say, well, what do you want us to do. If you have one industry or one business that has already started and he or she starts to tell them about what has been done at this XYZ company, you will immediately find others sitting up and following in their footsteps.

We must remain vigilant with respect to these chemicals, even to the individual chemicals, such as iodine, and be creative as to what we could do to properly control the distribution of these and the availability of these substances.

But as I mentioned, good enforcement, effective enforcement starts with intelligence. We need to find ways to improve our information gathering analysis and share it with appropriate proprietary protection so that early warning bells and whistles go off before meth traffickers establish a hold yet in another community.

We also need to network among our communities to share what works and what does not work in the intelligence-gathering initiatives. With respect to foot holds, though, we have got to be careful. Somebody had been telling me that in the Atlanta. General Atlanta area, meth was beginning to take hold.

I looked at the ADAM data, which stands for Arrestee's Drug Abuse Monitoring, by which we check to see who is being arrested, who is being admitted to emergency rooms, and it did not seem like in Atlanta the problem was that great.

Somebody pointed out to me that you have got to look at the more rural areas around Atlanta to see just what is happening, so we have got to be very careful in making judgments with respect to the data that we collect to see just what is happening.

One of the things that I would like for you to consider, if we take all the information you develop in debriefing somebody that you have just arrested or a member of the family of a person you have just arrested, and find out about money, find out about source, find out about where you got the stuff, and you feed that into a common database, with the automated assistance we have now, with the intelligence analytical capability we have now, we could do so much more than we could 28 years ago trying to figure out what was happening with crack.

I urge you as strongly as I can to understand how vital it is for you to collect the information. It may seem just like a small piece, but if you put the pieces together, you get the whole. As I understand it, meth has a clandestine lab database. It won't work unless we put the information in it.

I am rather really tickled to hear that you developed other regional and national databases to collect meth lab information to analyze trafficking patterns, and that you share that information with each other. But it is no better than the information that is going in.

That leads to money laundering. I will never forget speaking to somebody who had just been down to play a ball game with the defenders of the Metropolitan Correctional Institution in South Dade County, Florida. He came back angry because he had been talking to a fellow who was sentenced to five years on a drug charge.

He was 25 years old, and he said, man, I have got it made. I got three square meals a day, clean sheets. I could read. I exercise. They have got a good gym, and I played ball with you today. I have got all my money put away, and nobody is going to find it. I am here until five years. That is a legitimate business expense as far as I'm concerned. I'll be out and I'll never have to work again.

It is not just the body that you arrest and convict and sentence and send to prison. It is not just the stuff you get off the streets. They are in it for one reason, and that is money. We have got to make sure that we join together across this nation and track the money that goes with the trafficking or goes with the sale of precursor chemicals.

There again, we find agents that have been trained in following the drugs. We have got to expand our training capacity to make sure that we have agents who understand the dollar flows and that we feed that into a common database so that we trace the money, get the money, and interrupt the reason these people are doing business.

I have been in this job almost eight years. I am looking forward to going home to Miami, getting in my red truck and driving across this nation and seeing all the places that I saw only briefly but had to leave because I had to go back to Washington.

There are mountains that I want to climb that I saw from a distance. There are rivers that I want to kayak on as I saw as I went over the bridge to meet at City Hall with somebody.

Most of all, there are people that were doing their job in law enforcement that I had a chance to talk to, again, too briefly. I have been so impressed with law enforcement across this country, the dedication, the smarts, the care, the concern, the honor. It just makes me very, very proud to be associated with such a distinguished wonderful group of people.

My first summer job was in the Dade County Sheriff's Office. I was 18 years old. I just graduated from high school, and I was on my way to college in the fall. It was a little biddy place. The jail was on three or four floors of the courthouse. All of the sheriff's office was on five floors of the tiny courthouse.

Now I look at how that effort has grown and how professionalized law enforcement has become. I just want you to know that on behalf of the American people I salute you and I thank you from the bottom of my heart for the tremendous job you do day in and day out in the most difficult and dangerous of circumstances. You are all pretty incredible people. Thank you.

(Hearing concluded at 10:40 a.m.)