

1 So, that's a very important
2 discussion that we will continue to have. Now,
3 let me thank this panel. I must introduce the
4 Associate Attorney General. I'm tempted to say
5 that the Associate Attorney General, who's
6 arrived here from Washington D.C., was a victim
7 of the world largest unscheduled airline, but I
8 will not do that. I will not do that because his
9 unscheduled overnight stop in Minneapolis last
10 night was due to a slight weather cooling in the
11 Northern Great Plains.

12 And so, although he had that
13 unscheduled evening in Minneapolis, he is here
14 now and he's a catalyst for this task force. I
15 just want to tell you about him in about twenty
16 seconds. Bachelor's degree from Harvard, Law
17 Degree from Stanford, President of the Stanford
18 Law Journal, extensive private sector and public
19 sector experience, and this is a better country
20 because of people like Tony West decided to serve
21 their country. Tony West Associate Attorney
22 General.

23 ASSOCIATE ATTORNEY GENERAL TONY WEST:
24 Thank you, Senator Dorgan. I'm very pleased to
25 be here particularly because the journey did

1 start at 2:30 in the afternoon yesterday and took
2 us about six hours on the tarmac before we left
3 D.C. and then we got into Minneapolis last night
4 too late to get our connection so we flew standby
5 on the first flight out. But I want you to know
6 that there was not much that was going to keep us
7 from being here today for this hearing, and so I
8 am pleased to be here with you.

9 Let me acknowledge and thank my
10 colleagues from the Department of Justice
11 particularly the administrator of our office of
12 Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Bob
13 Listenbee, and Principal Deputy Assistant
14 Attorney General, Mary Lou Leary for their
15 excellent leadership in bringing together this
16 advisory committee, and Jim Antal, the designated
17 federal official who is the central person who is
18 responsible for organizing and leading the work
19 of this advisory committee. My thanks also to
20 Tracy Toulou who is the Director of our
21 Department's Office of Tribal Justice, and Deputy
22 BIA Director, Darren Cruzan, who not only -- both
23 have been great leaders not only in the work of
24 this task force but issues for Indian Country.

25 Let me also recognize two of our U.S.

1 Attorneys who are with us, Tim Purdon, who is the
2 U.S. Attorney here in the District of North
3 Dakota and is our host and who has been really
4 the critical leader in the federal working group
5 component of this task force, which I'll speak a
6 little about in a minute, and Mike Cotter who is
7 also with us, the U.S. Attorney of the District
8 of Montana, who I know is deeply committed to
9 serving Indian Country.

10 And, last but not least, let me
11 express my deep appreciation to the task force
12 advisory's committee two co-chairs, Senator
13 Dorgan and Joanne Shenandoah.

14 As everyone in this room well knows,
15 Senator Dorgan has been a champion of North
16 Dakota's tribes during his entire career,
17 including three decades in Congress. He has been
18 on the front lines of these issues and his
19 commitment to children in tribal nations is
20 simply unparalleled, and we are honored that you
21 have agreed to help lead us in this effort.

22 Likewise, Ms. Shenandoah is a highly
23 respected and deserving celebrated artist who has
24 used her talent to call attention to the plight
25 of children in Indian Country. We are so

1 fortunate to have you with us as well helping us
2 lead this effort. Thank you for your commitment
3 to this and thank you too to all of the members
4 of this advisory committee for your commitment
5 and for your expertise.

6 Fifty years ago, Attorney General
7 Robert Kennedy came here to Bismarck and spoke of
8 the tragic irony of first Americans living in the
9 freest country in the world, yet imprisoned by
10 conditions of poverty and depravation; conditions
11 not found in the natural order of things but
12 manmade imposed and perpetrated by bigotry, by
13 greed, and by violence.

14 And Attorney General Kennedy spoke of
15 our responsibility to reverse the historical tide
16 so that the light of freedom just dawning, as he
17 said in his own lifetime, might fully shine on
18 his children.

19 And so we've come here to Bismarck, a
20 half century later, to help fulfill that pledge
21 and to reaffirm a promise that we must make to
22 all our children. That their wellbeing, their
23 safety, that is our highest priority, that they
24 are sacred beings, gifts from the Creator to be
25 cherished, to be cared for, to be protected

1 because the simple sad fact, as we have heard
2 this morning, is that too many of our American
3 Indian and Alaska Native children still suffer or
4 witness violence in Indian Country. Too many see
5 family members of friends fall victim to
6 violence, and too many are victims of violence
7 themselves.

8 And the impact that this has on the
9 lives of individuals both young and old cannot be
10 overstated. It tears at the fabric of family and
11 community. It disrupts the present and too often
12 darkens the future. The scars of violence can
13 rub deep and have impacts that can seep from one
14 generation into the next.

15 We know that from our own research at
16 the Department of Justice, that a majority of
17 American's children, more than 60% percent are
18 exposed to some form of violence, crime, or abuse
19 ranging from brief encounters as witnesses to
20 serious episodes, serious violent episodes as
21 victims.

22 We know that tragically almost 40%
23 percent are direct victims of two or more violent
24 episodes. Often, this violence occurs, as we
25 have just heard from this distinguished panel, in

1 the place where our children should feel the
2 safest: At home.

3 While domestic violence plagues many
4 communities across our country, research shows us
5 that the rates of domestic violence against
6 Native women, are among the highest in the
7 United States. And while we don't know how many
8 American Indian and Alaska Native children
9 witness this kind of violence or how many are
10 removed from their homes and experience
11 disruption in their lives as a result of this
12 kind of violence, or how many end up continuing
13 the cycle by hurting others because they have
14 been victims of this kind of violence.

15 We do know that the consequences of
16 having been exposed to violence can be serious
17 for our children ranging from poor academic
18 performance and drug and alcohol abuse to
19 long-term psychological harm or even criminal
20 behavior later in life.

21 But we also know something else. We
22 know that we do not have to accept these outcomes
23 as inevitable. Our young people are resilient.
24 They can return to living normal, healthy lives so
25 long as they have the benefit of proper

1 intervention.

2 So, as we've heard from the testimony
3 today, let us look for new ways in which we can
4 engage all community members, tribal spiritual
5 leaders, elders and parents, teachers and
6 coaches, and importantly, young people
7 themselves.

8 Let us all be enlisted to address
9 this critical issue because it is a challenge
10 that requires no less. And this hearing I think
11 is an important step in that direction. And it's
12 a natural extension of the work that the Obama
13 Administration has pursued to fulfill this
14 nation's trust responsibility and address the
15 challenges that American Indian and Alaska Native
16 communities face.

17 It grows out of the work that Attorney
18 General Eric Holder began three years ago with a
19 new initiative that he called Defending
20 Childhood. And the goal of Defending Childhood
21 as Professor Deer reminds us, was to improve our
22 knowledge about what works to reduce children's
23 exposure to violence and how to lessen the long
24 term adverse impact of that exposure when it does
25 occur.

1 As part of that effort, as many of
2 you know, the Attorney General appointed a
3 national task force to identify ways to reduce
4 children's exposure to violence and recommend the
5 concrete policy changes at the federal level to
6 meet that goal. And as Professor Deer said, we
7 are implementing a lot of those recommendations
8 today.

9 A special effort aimed at examining
10 and addressing the exposure of American Indian
11 and Alaska Native children to violence in ways
12 that recognize the unique
13 government-to-government relationship between
14 sovereign tribal nations and the United States.

15 Now, there are two parts of this
16 special task force. There is a federal working
17 group comprised of high-ranking federal officials
18 who work with tribal nations everyday, and an
19 advisory committee, this advisory committee, that
20 is made up of experts with insights into
21 children's exposure to violence in Native
22 communities.

23 Now, the federal working group was
24 formed because we know that there are things that
25 we can do right now, things that don't have to

1 wait for study, things that can have a direct and
2 immediate impact in kids' lives.

3 So, officials from the Departments of
4 Justice, the Interior, and Health and Human Services,
5 with proven dedication and experience in Indian
6 Country, they come together as part of this
7 federal working group to do just that. And
8 already this group is making an important
9 difference.

10 Here's just one example: About a
11 year ago, I traveled to the Ute Mountain Ute and
12 Northern Cheyenne Reservations. And among the
13 places I visited were detention centers where
14 both adults and juveniles were held.

15 Now as Professor Big Foot reminds us,
16 it is always a tragedy whenever a young person is
17 locked up, but that tragedy is compounded when
18 that child is warehoused without any assistance
19 that can help prevent that child from future
20 incarceration. And in these two facilities, not
21 unlike what Chairman McDonald observed, kids were not
22 getting access to adequate educational programming
23 or counseling.

24 So, it was the federal working group
25 that came together and tackled this issue. They

1 cut through the red tape and they worked together
2 such that contracts are now being secured for
3 teachers who will provide culturally sensitive
4 educational and counseling services to Native
5 youths held in those BIA detention facilities at
6 both Ute Mountain Ute and Northern Cheyenne.

7 Now in addition to addressing those
8 immediate issues, we must also develop a
9 strategic approach to the long term issues of
10 violence that affect children in Indian Country.

11 So, we've augmented the work of the
12 federal working group with this advisory
13 committee of experts who dedicated themselves to
14 improving the lives of children in Native nations
15 and Native communities.

16 Over the next year, this advisory
17 committee will travel throughout the country
18 holding hearings and listening sessions just like
19 todays. They will go to Phoenix, they will go to
20 Ft. Lauderdale, they'll go to Alaska, they will
21 comb through the research and consult with others
22 to help us paint a clear picture of what the
23 incidents of violence among Native children looks
24 like, and it will help us to identify ways to
25 prevent it.

1 And next fall, this advisory
2 committee's work will culminate in a final
3 report, a strategic plan of action that will
4 guide practitioners and policymakers at all
5 levels, folks like me, and like the work of the
6 Defending Childhood Task Force, the
7 recommendations of this advisory committee will
8 not sit on a shelf collecting dust.

9 I think as you heard the Attorney
10 General say in his video greeting this morning,
11 the work of this advisory committee will really
12 serve as a blueprint that will help guide us into
13 the future.

14 So, this is our charge and our
15 challenge. Today represents an important and an
16 early step in protecting American Indian and
17 Alaska Native children. For I think about this
18 task force, I think about what the poet wrote so
19 many years ago that perhaps this world is a world
20 in which children suffer but maybe, just maybe,
21 we can lessen the number of suffering children.
22 And if we do not do this, then who will do this?
23 That's what I think this task force is all about.
24 No one here expects this work to be easy or that
25 the efforts we embark on here will lead to a

1 panacea. But it is an investment. It's an
2 investment in our children, an investment in the
3 future of sovereign tribal nations on this
4 continent. It's an investment that we fail to
5 make at our own peril, and it's an investment
6 whose return will not be measured in dollars and
7 cents, but in the young smiles that you create
8 and the doors of hope that you open and the
9 futures that you will shape and in the lives that
10 you will change.

11 So thank you and thank you for your
12 dedication to this effort. Thank you.

13 JOANNE SHENANDOAH: Thank you
14 very much for those kind and wonderful words and
15 your dedication as well. I just want to remind
16 people that we do have the safe room available if
17 anyone wants to go there. And I just want to say
18 to all the witnesses that we have been listening
19 and I personally love the idea of cultural
20 traditional aspects.

21 As you know, us Iroquois, have
22 something in place called "The Great Law of
23 Peace." And women had a lot to do with how to
24 make decisions on what happens to
25 perpetrators and what they did. And it's very