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SPEECH BY THE
HONORABLE JANET RENO,
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES
AT THE OPENING DINNER OF THE
UNITED STATES SENTENCING COMMISSION SYMPOSIUM
ON CRIME AND PUNISHMENT IN THE UNITED STATES --
DRUGS AND VIOLENCE IN AMERICA

- - -

Wednesday, June 16, 1993
Regency Ballroom
Hyatt Regency Washington on
on Capitol Hill Hotel
400 New Jersey Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C.

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P R O C E E D I N G S

(8:30 p.m.)

(Introduction by Hon. William W. Wilkins, Jr.)

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GENERAL RENO: I don't think that either before or since I have come to Washington have I felt so encouraged about the ability of America to look at the problems of crime, drug and violence in a comprehensive way and come up with a solution. I have never seen such a collection of both Federal and State officials here, correctional and preventative experts here. It is really one of the most encouraging evenings I have spent in a very long time, and they haven't even started talking yet.

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I think you sound the theme for where we have to go on the issues that we confront this evening and in your conference. We've got to start discussing, discussing rather than even debating, because discussion helps us reach solutions and debating is trying to prove who's right.

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We've got to start evaluating to understand what works and what doesn't work. We've got to get rid of party labels and start looking at crime, drugs and violence in a nonpartisan way, because nobody is interested in promoting these no matter what party they belong to.

25

As you say, we've got to reduce the rhetoric and

1 increase the goodwill by which we face these issues,
2 because doing that, as you have in this conference, and
3 bringing all these people together tonight, we can make a
4 difference with respect to crime, drugs and violence in
5 America if we only but try.

6 I think let's start at the end of the line. I
7 think what we have got to do, for I have been on the
8 sometimes losing end of the Federal Government saying,
9 here, let the States do it, and the States saying, here,
10 let the counties do it, and the counties and communities
11 with their back up against the wall have had to develop
12 new and innovative and bold programs.

13 I think the time has come to really emphasize
14 the spirit of Federalism and to realize that we should
15 have a partnership between communities, States, and the
16 Federal Government, so that nobody's dumping on each
17 other, but that together we develop a rational policy as
18 to how to proceed,

19 Instead of engaging in issues about let's
20 Federalize this or let's dump on the States for this
21 cause, I think the National District Attorneys
22 Association, the United States Attorneys, the National
23 Association of Attorneys General, and all others concerned
24 should work together, as I hope we will in the months to
25 come, to develop a rational policy as to what should be

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1 charged in Federal court, what should be charged in State
2 court.

3 We should look at the availability of prison
4 cells and fashion remedies and file charges based, not on
5 where we're going to get the most time, but let's develop
6 pooling resources so that we can use our prison cells
7 number one to make sure that dangerous, violent
8 recidivists are put away and kept away and incapacitated,
9 as they should be; that major distributors and dealers and
10 traffickers are put away and kept away; and that the
11 prison resources of this Nation are used in a
12 comprehensive fashion to do that.

13 I've been in a jurisdiction where I'm about 350
14 miles from the border. If I were in the Southern District
15 of New York, with New Jersey across the river and the
16 Eastern District across the other river, I'd start looking
17 at violent crime, if one State couldn't house people for
18 the length of time the judges are sentencing them, as if
19 it were more a Federal problem.

20 But I am convinced that, working as a
21 partnership, without the Federal Government being the
22 know-it-all, without the Federal Government saying to
23 States, you do it, without the Federal Government saying,
24 you can have our money if you do it the way we want it
25 done, that working together in an informed partnership, we

1 can use the limited resources we have to meet the
2 priorities that the American people I feel have emphasized
3 again and again: the crimes of violence, the major
4 traffickers, the people who tear apart the very physical
5 fabric of our society.

6 I think it's imperative that we all join
7 together and approach it from a business point of view as
8 well. The time is over. The American people are fed up
9 with people that say, let's pass tougher sentences,
10 without putting the price tag on those sentences, without
11 ensuring the people of this country that there are enough
12 prison cells to house people for the length of time that
13 the sentences call for and that we have enough operating
14 expenses to house the prisoners if we had the beds in the
15 first place.

16 I spoke to group after group throughout my
17 community for 15 years and they began to understand what
18 the dollar and cents approach of trying to build our way
19 out of the crime crisis was.

20 Let us at least build enough prisons so that we
21 have truth in sentencing for those dangerous offenders,
22 for the major distributors, so that the sentences of our
23 courts will mean what they say. I think we can easily
24 afford to do that both in the State and Federal system.

25 Then let's be frank with ourselves and the rest

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1 of America. Americans know it anyway. There are too many
2 States that I've travelled through where people are
3 serving only 50 percent of their sentence or less. I come
4 from a State that has an average sentence of 20 to 30
5 percent of the sentence.

6 I come from a State that's about 5 years ahead
7 of the Federal system, a State that's passed a lot of
8 minimum mandatory laws, a State that developed sentencing
9 guidelines in 1983, a State whose legislature didn't match
10 the dollars with the guidelines, a State that had 2 weeks
11 before I came to Washington a conference on how to end
12 gridlock, gridlock that was occurring because people who
13 were serving minimum mandatory sentences for less
14 dangerous offenses were remaining in prison while more
15 dangerous offenders were being released to meet a Federal
16 population cap.

17 Let us understand that for these people, that
18 most prisoners are coming out sooner rather than later
19 ultimately, unless we focus on how to do it right.

20 It makes no sense in the Federal system or in
21 the State system to have a prisoner who's drug-involved,
22 who has a terrible drug problem, put him in prison, have
23 them serve part of their sentence or all of their sentence
24 if you happen to have enough prison cells, and then pick
25 them up and put them back into the community with no

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1 follow-up at all. But every time I turn around, it's done
2 again and again throughout America.

3 Even if they get treatment in prison, they're
4 picked up and put back into the community without after-
5 care, without follow-up, with job training and placement,
6 without respite, without 24-hour call-in service where if
7 they're about to fall back that they have somebody to
8 reach out and to hold onto. That's just an absolutely
9 stupid expenditure of taxpayers' dollars.

10 Too many treatment people have taught me again
11 and again that we can make a difference by providing a
12 transition, by getting them detoxed and stabilized, by
13 moving them into residential non-secure facilities that
14 are less expensive, by moving them into day treatment,
15 then into after-care, all of it conditioned by random drug
16 testing, so that offenders can have a chance to get off on
17 the right foot with support as they return to the
18 community.

19 But we're going to have to go further, because
20 many of these offenders go right back to the apartment
21 building where the problem started in the first place,
22 because that's where their family is and there's no place
23 to go. We're going to have to start thinking of new and
24 alternative housing sites where recovering offenders can
25 be drug-free and have a chance of making it without having

1 the sources and the influences that created the problem in
2 the first place drive them back where they came from.

3 We have got to have opportunities for recovering
4 offenders. We have a whole category of young men,
5 primarily 18 to 30, who have one or two prior records.
6 They've licked their drug problem, if just momentarily.
7 They'd like to get off on the right foot. They try to get
8 a job. They can't get a job because nobody wants to hire
9 a recovering addict with a prior record.

10 Unless we break that cycle, unless we give to
11 those recovering offenders the opportunity for a job,
12 we're never going to make it in terms of success with
13 these offenders.

14 The average response I used to get from
15 employers: Janet, why should I hire that person when the
16 next person has just been let go from his work because his
17 company has folded and he's a wonderful employee who has
18 had a tremendous record and he's never used drugs? We're
19 going to have to think of new and creative incentives to
20 get people back into the labor force, back into roles as
21 constructive members of society, if we're going to lick
22 this problem.

23 We've got to look at job training and placement
24 as we return people to the communities, in every way
25 possible to give them a chance to get off on the right

1 foot.

2 But as we look at our approach to violence,
3 we've got to look at one particular form of violence,
4 family violence, domestic violence. Shortly after I took
5 office in 1978, the Dade County Medical Examiner, a
6 wonderful man, Dr. Joe Davis, called me and said: Janet,
7 nobody's ever come over here to look at why people get
8 killed in Dade County.

9 We went to look with some university interns and
10 spent a comprehensive few months doing a thorough study.
11 From that we developed startling statistics that indicated
12 that 40 percent of the people killed in Dade County in a
13 25 or so year period had been killed as a result of
14 domestic violence, of husband-wife, boyfriend-girlfriend,
15 ex-spouse violence.

16 Nobody was paying any attention to domestic
17 violence in those days. We got an LEAA grant and we
18 developed a program that became a model for the Nation.
19 We have struggled over these last 15 years to get the
20 concept accepted. We've developed a domestic violence
21 court and a domestic violence center.

22 Slowly, throughout America people are beginning
23 to understand how we have to intervene and send a clear,
24 absolutely firm message that domestic violence won't be
25 tolerated, won't be tolerated because the child who

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1 watches his father beat his mother is going to come to
2 accept violence as a way of life, won't be tolerated
3 because it is tearing apart the very physical fabric of
4 our family and our society as a whole.

5 We can do so much if we spread that message,
6 that working together we can develop effective methods
7 with regards to family violence.

8 We can send messages to that lady who doesn't
9 want to prosecute, and there were so many that came
10 through my door saying, I don't like your no-drop policy,
11 saying to that person: Look, we know you don't want him
12 to go to jail, but prosecute with us and we'll get him
13 into a drug treatment program and we can help you and
14 we'll work with you.

15 We've got to keep trying. We've got to find the
16 programs to make these opportunities available for these
17 people if we are to make a difference.

18 One of your questions is going to be: Where are
19 we going to get the money? We're going to probably have
20 fewer dollars in America to deal with this problem and
21 we're going to have to probably be a lot smarter in how we
22 spend our money.

23 I come from a State which has a balanced budget
24 requirement and makes it a crime to deficit spend, a State
25 that has had revenue shortfalls in the last several years,

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1 dependent as it is on sales tax revenues. And I can tell
2 you that it's hard to learn to cut 6 months into a fiscal
3 year when you have to cut a million dollars out of a \$20
4 million budget, but it's possible. And it's amazing what
5 people can do if they have to use those dollars in a
6 smarter, wiser way.

7 I think we're going to be faced with that
8 problem at every level of government throughout America.

9 But then let's ask how we're spending the money,
10 where are we spending it? Are we spending it on costly
11 interdiction? I go back to what I said at the beginning:
12 We've got to evaluate how we're spending the dollars and
13 what's working.

14 In the early eighties, our Dade County grand
15 jury did a study on narcotics. We heard from Federal
16 officials who said that before a task force arrived in
17 South Florida to deal with the problem of drugs 15 percent
18 of the stuff was being interdicted, after the task force
19 came a little over 25 percent was being interdicted, and
20 to have any real impact on drug abuse in America 75
21 percent of the stuff would have to be interdicted, and
22 that would be cost prohibitive.

23 I always used to think, wouldn't it be wonderful
24 if I could go to Washington and find out if that was all
25 really true. And now we have a chance to do thoughtful

1 studies to find out if it's really true.

2 We've got to understand that there are 34
3 separate Federal agencies all fussing around with drug
4 enforcement, sometimes in conflict, sometimes fragmented,
5 sometimes overlapping, and oftentimes not on the same page
6 in terms of a coherent strategy.

7 I'm dedicated to trying to make sure that there
8 is no duplication, that everybody's on the same page, that
9 we use every single dollar spent in drug enforcement as
10 wisely and as cost effectively as we can, because we can
11 make a difference if we use our dollars right, both in
12 terms of punishment that means what it says and
13 prevention.

14 When I took office as State attorney, I started
15 focusing on the juvenile justice program because I was
16 really interested in terms of the causes of crimes and
17 what could be done to prevent crime in the first place. I
18 focused on 16 and 17-year-old sometimes young men with a
19 prior record. I looked at programs that could be
20 developed, and I recognized that by waiting until that
21 late hour in a person's life we would never have enough
22 resources ever to change both that young man and his other
23 colleagues similarly situated if we waited too long.

24 I began to focus then on dropout prevention and
25 our Dade County grand jury did a study on dropout

1 prevention, and I realized that it's too late to wait
2 until a child is 12 or 13 when they're about to drop out
3 of school, because they've already fallen behind at their
4 reading level, their grade level, they've lost self-
5 esteem, they've lost self-respect. They're already acting
6 out to gain attention through other means rather than
7 academic successes.

8 So I started developing neighborhood
9 intervention programs focused on Head Start and the first
10 years of elementary school. And then the crack epidemic
11 hit in 1985 and the doctors took me to the neonatal unit
12 at Jackson Memorial Hospital, and I have learned so much.

13 I suggest to you that when we look at the issues
14 of crime, drugs, violence, teen pregnancy, youth gangs,
15 homelessness, which sees an ever-increasing number of its
16 ranks include women and children, youth violence, which
17 has become one of the most startling phenomenon, one of
18 the most tragic phenomenon I have seen in my adult life in
19 Miami, when we see all these problems, we have to
20 understand that they are reflective of a far deeper
21 problem in society. And that is that for the last 30
22 years in America we have forgotten and neglected our
23 children, and you in the fields concerned with what we can
24 do about it know that better than anybody else.

25 We've got to go beyond, then, just discussing

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1 solutions. We've got to go beyond reducing the rhetoric.
2 We've got to go beyond evaluating just what works. And we
3 have got to send a message throughout all America that I
4 as a prosecutor will never be able to build enough prisons
5 18 years from now for children who are born today from
6 drug-involved mothers unless we start now in giving that
7 child a good chance at a strong and healthy life.

8 (Applause.)

9 We have got to tell that businessman that, if he
10 doesn't care about children from common humanity's sake,
11 that he is not going to have a work force in 5, 10, and 15
12 years with the skills necessary to fill the jobs to
13 maintain his company as a first-rate company or America as
14 a first-rate Nation.

15 We have got to tell that senior citizen who too
16 often has told me in the past, Janet, don't talk to me
17 about children, I sent my son and grandchild and even
18 helped send my great-grandson to college, that their
19 pension isn't going to be worth the paper it's written on
20 in 5 and 10 years unless we have that work force that can
21 maintain this Nation as a first-rate Nation and fuel an
22 economy that can sustain that pension.

23 All of us who care about crime and its solutions
24 know in our heart, in our minds, in our gut what the
25 solutions are in terms of balanced punishment and

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1 prevention. And we've got to tell that doctor who says,
2 that's not my problem, I have this fancy practice out in
3 the nice end of town, that the very health care
4 institutions that he depends on are being brought to their
5 knees because we are not making an investment in children
6 early on.

7 And even if people don't care and don't listen,
8 put it to them in terms of dollars and remind them that
9 for every dollar spent for prenatal care we save three
10 dollars within three years for health care costs related
11 to low birth weights arising from lack of prenatal care.

12 (Applause.)

13 And if they still don't care, tell them that
14 unless we invest in children they're going to be held up
15 in the middle of their driveway with a gun to their head
16 by 14-year-olds that we will never be able to save unless
17 we make an early investment.

18 We have a job to sell all America on balanced
19 punishment and prevention. You never raised a child just
20 punishing them. You never raised a child threatening
21 punishment and not carrying it out. You never raised a
22 child successfully unless the punishment imposed was fair
23 and consistent with the violation.

24 But you never raised a child with punishment
25 alone. You raised a child with love, nurturing, bonding,

1 affection, that gave that child a fabric, a community to
2 grow in as a strong and healthy human being.

3 We've all got to turn from our roles as
4 prosecutors, as judges, as correctional officials, as
5 nurses, doctors, teachers, child development experts, and
6 focus on the bigger picture, because we all tend to focus
7 on our narrow little sphere where we concentrate on a
8 person's life to try to make a difference.

9 Unless we reach out and join our hands together
10 and re-weave the fabric of society around too many of our
11 children and our families, we are never ever going to
12 address the problems you are addressing in this
13 conference.

14 How do we do it? We've got to develop a
15 national agenda for children, an agenda that is
16 implemented by communities and the Federal Government
17 coming together as a partnership, without the Federal
18 Government telling the community, this is what you will
19 do, you have got to take this grant that doesn't fit just
20 what you want to do and take it the way we give it. Those
21 days should be gone.

22 We've got to have communities, that can identify
23 their needs and resources far better than anybody else,
24 say, this is what we need, and then the Federal Government
25 and the State need to work together to fill in the blanks

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1 and put together the pieces of the puzzle in a partnership
2 with communities, rather than telling them what to do.

3 The Federal Government, quite simply, is to get
4 its act together. Have you ever sat around a table in the
5 community where you're trying to address the problems that
6 we discuss here tonight and have somebody from the
7 Department of Labor, somebody from the Department of
8 Justice Weed and Seed Program, somebody from HHS, somebody
9 from DOE? They've got different programs around the
10 community. They're not coordinated. They don't
11 understand each other. They haven't met each other and
12 they haven't worked together to develop a coordinated
13 Federal effort that can truly serve a community in a
14 coordinated and planned sort of way.

15 Ladies and gentlemen, I don't know how much the
16 Federal Government is spending, but I know from my 15
17 years in Miami that, working together, working with
18 communities, we can spend it wiser. Look at what we do
19 today. A lady in a public housing development says: Ms.
20 Reno, you got to help me. I got a minimum wage job, first
21 job I've ever had since my four babies were born. I'm
22 going to get off welfare, but then they tell me I'm going
23 to lose benefits and I'm going to be worse off than if I
24 hadn't gone to work in the first place.

25 Another lady calls me and says: Ms. Reno, my

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1 daughter has a severe and crippling disease. I've always
2 had good health care benefits, but I've lost those; my
3 employer has had problems. I still make too much money to
4 be eligible for Medicaid, but I can't afford treatment for
5 my daughter because it's too costly. Do you know what
6 they told me today at the hospital? Why didn't I quit my
7 job so I could be eligible for Medicaid?

8 That is what too many Americans are being told
9 and that's what we've got to change, change it to develop
10 a partnership where we take all our limited resources and
11 coordinate them together in ensuring for all our children
12 an agenda, an agenda that first of all focuses on strong
13 and healthy parents old enough, wise enough, and
14 financially able enough to take care of their children.

15 Let's do something about teen pregnancy in
16 America. We can make a difference each time we have a
17 stronger, older parent.

18 (Applause.)

19 Let's talk to our young men. I just read of a
20 remarkable program, and I hope it's working as well as its
21 press indicated it's working, where young men coming out
22 of prison are getting parenting skills programs to enable
23 them to come out as stronger, healthier parents.

24 There's something pretty wonderful about
25 watching a young man with his son. Too often we've said

1 it's the mother's responsibility. He sees the magic in
2 it. Let's, through high school programs and all other
3 programs, give that young man a sense of the wonder of
4 parenting.

5 Let's focus on the time it takes. I heard that
6 a college president recently said that his students,
7 compared to 30 years ago, were intellectually much more
8 sophisticated, but emotionally much less mature, and he
9 attributed it to the fact that both parents were working
10 or single parents were working and that children didn't
11 have enough parenting around them on a regular basis.

12 Look at what happens today. Get the children's
13 breakfast, get to work, try a case in my office in Miami,
14 finish at 6:30, call witnesses, leave, get home at 7:30,
15 dinner on the table, the children bathed, the homework
16 done. The weekend is taken up by running errands. Sunday
17 night they start over again. They don't have quality time
18 with their children.

19 Let's focus on providing parents time to be with
20 their children, no matter what type of employer we are,
21 whether it be the Department of Justice or a private
22 sector employer. All of us are going to have to figure
23 out how we put the family first in our business, in our
24 work, in America.

25 We have got to focus on providing every child in

1 America's parent with prenatal care. We have got to focus
2 on the age of zero to three, and you have got to help me
3 send the message that child development experts have been
4 sending again and again: These are the most formative
5 years of a child's life. 50 percent of all learned human
6 response is learned in the first year of life.

7 Yet, as families have disintegrated around
8 children we haven't combined together to form institutions
9 that can provide the education in that first, most
10 critical year of all that can make a difference in that
11 child's life.

12 The concept of reward and punishment is learned
13 in the first three years. What difference does it make
14 how many prisons we're going to build 18 years from now if
15 the child is not going to grow to know what punishment
16 means because there wasn't a nurturing society, a
17 nurturing world around that child?

18 You've got to go out and tell everybody what it
19 means to walk into a neonatal unit at the beginning of the
20 crack epidemic and see a baby, not held or talked to
21 except when changed and fed for 6 weeks, beginning to
22 evidence non-human reactions, whereas the severely
23 deformed child across the neonatal unit who had her
24 parents with her almost around the clock was beginning to
25 respond with a smiles and human response. And you

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1 understand why those first three years are so important.

2 We've got to make sure that we provide
3 preventative medical care for all our children. Something
4 is terribly wrong with a society that says to a 70-year-
5 old person, you can have an operation that extends your
6 life expectancy by 3 years, but says to the child of the
7 working poor, sorry, you don't have health care benefits,
8 but you make too much for Medicaid and you can't get
9 simple medical treatment that will extend the child's
10 health by more than we can ever imagine.

11 We have got to work to make sure that every child
12 in America gets constructive edu-care, blending into Head
13 Start, that Head Start is improved and expanded on in
14 every way possible, not as just an erratic program here
15 and there where happenstance will have it, but
16 comprehensive programs throughout the school system.

17 In our schools, we've got to free our teachers'
18 time to teach and we have got to develop conflict
19 resolution programs in our elementary schools that teach
20 our children that they can resolve their differences
21 peacefully. Those programs are working throughout America
22 and they've got to become an accepted part of our
23 curriculum.

24 We have got to send a message to advertisers
25 that we don't want violence advertised on television when

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1 our children are watching it.

2 (Applause.)

3 We've got to be alert for signs of family
4 violence and children's violence in our emergency rooms
5 throughout America. We've got to respond more often when
6 we see the black eye with something more than treating the
7 black eye, but by referring that lady for counseling and
8 to follow up so that we understand the cause of violence,
9 and we see that the child is followed up in terms of
10 counseling to let them know that that is not an accepted
11 way of life.

12 We have got to look at what we do to our
13 children afternoons and in the evenings, wandering around,
14 drifting around, watching violence on TV. If we took all
15 the resources we spend in apprehending and incarcerating
16 people and put them up front in programs for children
17 after school and in the evenings with police officers and
18 others who cared, we could make a whale of a difference in
19 terms of crime and lost lives.

20 Our police officers are doing so much in terms
21 of wonderful, constructive efforts, forming teams with
22 public health nurses and social workers that work with
23 children in families at risk in terms of dealing with
24 their problems as a whole and helping to restore them,
25 because we will never solve the problem of the child by

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1 itself unless we rebuild the family around that child.

2 We have got to look at economic development.
3 We're not going to develop economies if we just say,
4 there, here's a job, unless we have the skills necessary
5 to fill that job.

6 Let's start looking in the seventh grade at
7 aptitude and interest and then, beginning through summer
8 job programs that have a realistic match to the aptitude
9 and interest, work experience programs and school
10 programs, to develop a comprehensive path that a child
11 knows that they can follow that will enable them to earn a
12 living wage when they graduate from high school.

13 There is something frustrating as you watch a
14 child in a summer job program chipping away at the paint
15 on a curb with no sense of where that's going to lead them
16 down the road 1 year, 5 years, or 10 years hence. We can
17 make that difference.

18 We can give our youngsters an opportunity for
19 public service that they want so desperately. I remember
20 the monuments throughout my community that the young men
21 from the CCC, the Civilian Conservation Corps, built
22 during the Depression. I remember the people who went off
23 to World War Two, who were heroes and heroines to me. I
24 remember the young men and women who went halfway around
25 the world in John Kennedy's Peace Corps.

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1 Our crisis, our challenge, our drama, is on the
2 streets of America today. Let us harness the magnificent
3 energies in our children at every level and let them work
4 together with us in serving the people of America in
5 rebuilding our streets, our families, and the world around
6 these children.

7 Children, given half a fighting chance, can be
8 so strong and so wonderful. They are so tough. They have
9 such wonder in their eyes. We've got to give them that
10 half a fighting chance.

11 Thank you.

12 (Applause.)

13 I told you about police officers that cared. I
14 have a special, special, wonderful privilege tonight to
15 introduce some police officers who care and care deeply.
16 Tonight you will be able to hear a unique and innovative
17 drug demand reduction initiative that was established by
18 the United States Attorneys Office in Delaware.

19 The First State Force is an unusual anti-drug
20 rock and roll band, comprised of 14 police officers from
21 ten different departments located throughout Delaware. No
22 turf wars in Delaware.

23 These officers volunteer their time to perform
24 concerts several times a month to the children of
25 Delaware, using music to stress the importance of staying

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1 drug-free. Their performances in schools and to the
2 public have reached over a quarter of a million people
3 during the past four years.

4 This outstanding group of officers represent the
5 very best of the new role being performed throughout this
6 country by law enforcement in addressing the needs of our
7 children. It's with great pleasure that I introduce the
8 First State Force.

9 (Applause.)

10 (End of speech at 9:03 p.m.)

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