

**ATTORNEY GENERAL JANET RENO
ON NPR'S "TALK OF THE NATION"**

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1 MR. SUARAZ: Ms. Reno, welcome to Talk of the
2 Nation.

3 GENERAL RENO: Thank you.

4 MR. SUARAZ: When we set this program up, we
5 asked you whether there was special you'd like to talk
6 about; and although we'd like to cover many of the
7 subjects in the recent headlines involving you and your
8 office -- the challenge to the Voting Rights Act contained
9 in a new Supreme Court decision; the rumors swirling
10 around FBI Director William Sessions; the still-unfilled
11 Chief's Office at the Justice Department's Civil Rights
12 Division; and many others -- we want to start where you
13 asked us to: With children. And with violence.

14 If you, listening, have questions for the
15 Attorney General, especially questions about what can be
16 done to lower the level of violence committed by and
17 against children, give us a call. Our number in
18 Washington: (800) 989-8255.

19 Ms. Reno, what can we do for a neighborhood like
20 Benning Park?

21 GENERAL RENO: I think there are too many
22 neighborhoods in America like Benning Park. I left a
23 community where I thought that the greatest single crime
24 problem we faced was youth violence, and children being
25 hurt and killed. And I think we can do something about

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1 it.

2 I think we've got to let all people know, no matter
3 what their age, that poverty and broken homes and problems
4 of where you came from are no excuse for putting a gun up
5 beside somebody's head and hurting them or killing them.
6 That's just -- you're going to, if you do something like
7 that, face certain punishment. It will be firm
8 punishment, it will be punishment that sends a message.
9 That's what we should develop on the punishment side of
10 it. It should be punishment that's carried out.

11 But we've got to understand that, in many instances,
12 people who commit a crime are returning to the community;
13 sooner, oftentimes, rather than later. And we have got to
14 provide an opportunity for youngsters who commit a robbery
15 to know that, as they come back from the punishment, there
16 is an opportunity for them to truly get off on the right
17 foot.

18 However, I became convinced after watching the
19 streets of Miami, that you can't wait for punishment. We
20 have got to do far more than we've done in the past, to
21 prevent crime; to give a children an opportunity to grow
22 in strong families, where there is supervision, where
23 there are limits laid down as to what the right thing to
24 do is. I think children desperately want that, and I
25 think we can do more.

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1 MR. SUARAZ: Now, I'm been interviewing
2 prosecutors for years, and quite frankly, I've never heard
3 one who talks like you; and talks about all the things you
4 do: Low birth-weight babies; family breakup; job
5 training. Quite frankly, sometimes you sound more like a
6 sociologist than lawyer. If you could control the
7 Congress, what are the first three practical things you'd
8 pass, that would put into place some of these concepts
9 that you talk about?

10 GENERAL RENO: Well, first of all, I think it's
11 important, and I don't mean to go back to that, but I
12 think it's important to go back to punishment. Because
13 when you raise children, you've got to have punishment for
14 violations of conduct that's unacceptable. That
15 punishment has to be fair; it has to be carried out when
16 it's threatened. But at the same time, you've got to have
17 a nurturing environment: One that, where a child can grow
18 and thrive.

19 And those two have to go together, I think, in
20 order to produce strong law-abiding children.

21 I came to this conclusion a long time ago. When
22 I first became a prosecutor in Miami, I was focusing on
23 the end of the line. And then I watched the kids come
24 through the system, and realized that we would never have
25 enough prisons for all the kids similarly situated, unless

1 we started much earlier.

2 So I looked at dropout prevention, and thought
3 that might be the place to start, with good comprehensive
4 dropout programs that prevented it. I realized that, when
5 a child is 11, 12 or 13, so much of what their future is,
6 is already determined. So we started with 5-year-olds in
7 kindergarten.

8 Pretty soon, the doctors took me to the neonatal
9 unit of the public hospital, to try to figure out what we
10 should do about crack-addicted babies, and crack-involved
11 mothers. As I learned from the doctors, I learned a lot
12 about child development, and learned that the first three
13 years of life are their most formative; that that's when a
14 person learns the concept of reward and punishment, and
15 develops a conscience.

16 We can build all the prisons in the world, but
17 if the person doesn't understand what punishment means,
18 what good is it going to do? And unfortunately, we are
19 seeing children come into the system who have no sense of
20 remorse, who have no sense that they've done something
21 wrong.

22 For that reason, what I'd like to see us develop
23 are comprehensive programs aimed at the young juvenile
24 offender, when they first are guilty of real offenses.
25 Programs that let them know that there is a certain

1 punishment for what they do; but if they want to work with
2 us in terms of reintegrating into the community after they
3 have been punished, in an orderly and reasonable way,
4 we're going to be there to support them along the way.

5 The second point, I think, is that we need to
6 provide our children with proper preventative medical
7 care, prenatal care, immunizations. I read that a
8 significant percentage of children in the District don't
9 have immunizations. And you say, well, what does that
10 have to do with crime? Every time you put a roadblock to
11 a child growing as a strong and healthy child, you create
12 further problems. You create further cost for the public
13 hospitals that could be prevented.

14 For every dollar spent for prenatal care, you
15 can save \$3 down the road for health care cost associated
16 with low birth weights. For every dollar spent for
17 immunizations, you can save money that will be used to
18 treat epidemics. So it's common sense that dictates an
19 investment up front, as well as a punishment after the
20 fact.

21 MR. SUARAZ: And arguably, that money that would
22 be thus saved, you could use on all these interventions
23 later on, if you had to.

24 GENERAL RENO: Exactly. I think America for too
25 long has waited for crisis to occur: To build prisons, to

1 have major expenditures for epidemics; to do so much after
2 the fact. Somebody just told me **that** there is a waiting
3 list in Washington, for Washington drug treatment
4 programs; that there are people who've been waiting for
5 weeks. A dollar invested in a drug treatment program up
6 front is going to save somebody from the being the victim
7 of a crime; it's going to save us from dollars down the
8 road. It's just common sense.

9 But when you talk about the three initiatives, I
10 don't, I think one of our tendencies is to focus on one
11 particular aspect. I think the important thing is to look
12 at a child as a whole, and as part of a family.

13 I think one of the first steps we have to take
14 is to make sure that our parents are old enough, wise
15 enough, and financially able enough to take care of their
16 children; not in luxury, but in a decent surrounding. And
17 we've got to address the problem of teen pregnancy, and do
18 what we can to give our teenagers an opportunity for a
19 future; an opportunity to be strong adult and mature
20 parents, before they take on this awesome responsibility
21 of raising children.

22 MR. SUARAZ: Well, in preparing for this
23 program, I read several of your speeches where you, quite
24 frankly, said openly to the audience that every year we
25 can delay a childbirth, we get a 1 year older and 1 year

1 stronger parent. Is that really -- I guess it can be
2 demonstrated, using statistics, and looking at what's out
3 there, every year of delay?

4 GENERAL RENO: I don't have the statistics right
5 at hand. But everybody who's analyzed the issue says
6 that, for every 14-year-old, I mean, for every teen
7 pregnancy of a child born to a 14-year-old who's certainly
8 not old enough or wise enough to take care of a child,
9 you're going to save so many problems for that child if
10 you wait until that parent is old enough and wise enough.
11 That's one of the steps.

12 I think another step that we've got to take is
13 looking at Educare. If our families have disintegrated
14 around too many of our children, we've got to understand
15 that those first years of life are really important, and
16 terribly formative in terms of developing conscience and
17 developing a sense of right and wrong.

18 It was touching the other day, I was on a plane
19 and an 11-month-old child was sitting across the aisle
20 from me. Her mother was -- no, it was a little boy -- his
21 mother was wonderful with him. I mean, she played with
22 him, she talked to him; and then he came over and sat in
23 my lap. And I was thinking, here is an 11-month-old, and
24 look how much he has learned already.

25 And I was reminded that 50 percent of all

1 learned human response is learned in the first year of
2 life. This is where the whole foundation of life is being
3 set.

4 And this is where, I think, we have to make an
5 investment in what I call Educare: Which is good, safe,
6 constructive child care, that gives the child a good
7 opportunity in those first and very formative years.

8 MR. SUARAZ: Now, one of the things that you've
9 mentioned in our discussion is violence. And quite
10 frankly, one of the things that shocks people most about
11 younger criminals is the way that they've been, or seem to
12 be, desensitized to violence. The threshold seems to be
13 so much lower for killing, for maiming; the ease with
14 which a 14-year-old can shoot someone on the street is
15 really quite frightening.

16 Where does this come from? And you say you're
17 seeing people at the end of the process. How do you catch
18 them at the beginning?

19 GENERAL RENO: I think we can do a lot more. I
20 think one of the reasons that, one of the first things
21 that we can focus on is family violence. We did a study
22 in Dade County of the people who'd been killed over a
23 25-year period, and discovered that 40 percent of the
24 homicides at the time were related to husband-wife,
25 boyfriend-girlfriend, ex-spouse violence.

1 The child who watches his father beat his mother
2 comes to accept violence as a way of life. When you see
3 the increase in child abuse, you see that violence is,
4 again, a way of life. This cuts across all socioeconomic
5 groups. And I think doctors can do so much, in terms of
6 emergency room admissions, not just in treating the black
7 eye of the person who comes in, the victim of domestic
8 violence; but in referring the two involved for
9 counseling, to see what can be done to avoid the problem
10 for the future.

11 In many schools in this Country, there are now
12 programs in the elementary schools that teach children how
13 to resolve conflict peacefully. We have seen a lot done
14 in our public schools around the Country, about education
15 and prevention relating to drug abuse. I think we can do
16 the same with respect to violence.

17 Doctors are coming to understand that violence
18 is the greatest public health problem amongst our young
19 today. More children are killed by homicide, I think,
20 than any other immediate cause. Through programs in the
21 schools, through other efforts, I think we can make a
22 difference.

23 I think it's important that Americans send
24 messages to advertisers, that we don't want violence
25 advertised at a time when our children are particularly

1 susceptible to it on television.

2 The Carnegie Foundation has done a marvelous
3 study, called the Risk and Opportunities of Nonschool
4 Hours. We invest in prisons for kids who commit violent
5 acts; whereas, if we started for those children whose
6 parents are working, or who have been raised by a single
7 parent who is working or parents who don't care, who are
8 allowed to drift through the afternoon and into the
9 evening, I think we can do so much in terms of developing
10 programs -- not just sports programs, but programs that go
11 to that child's interest -- that can involve them in
12 constructive activities after school and in the evening,
13 at far less cost than what we're spending to try to
14 straighten out these children's lives.

15 MR. SUARAZ: My guest this hour on Talk of the
16 Nation, the Attorney General of the United States,
17 Janet Reno. Our number here at Studio One in Washington
18 is (800) 989-8255. We're going to start taking your calls
19 this hour. Ms. Reno, if I could remind you to put your
20 headphones on, because that's the only way that you'll be
21 able to hear Tim, in Columbus, who we now welcome to the
22 program. Tim?

23 TIM: Hi.

24 MR. SUARAZ: Hi.

25 TIM: I just had a question. It's not related

1 to children in any way. But first, I'd like to say, good
2 afternoon, Attorney General Reno.

3 GENERAL RENO: Good afternoon.

4 TIM: I currently work for the U.S. Attorney's
5 Office in Columbus, Ohio. And my position as an
6 undergraduate intern in the Stay in School Program will be
7 eliminated in September. What I'm wanting to know is, if
8 you could explain to me, the economic wisdom of such a
9 decision. It seems counterproductive.

10 MR. SUARAZ: Could you explain to us what the
11 program is, Tim?

12 TIM: Sure. It's a program that allows
13 part-time employment for about 20 hours while, you know,
14 you attend full-time classes. And currently, the
15 situation is, we can't work full-time, you know, while
16 school's in; and then during fall, I mean, during summer
17 quarter we start out and we work full-time and don't
18 attend classes. But the situation is that it will be
19 eliminated, and I was just wondering, you know, how that
20 will be used to benefit, you know, the current students,
21 and how that will be replaced by 7, 9's and 11's, doing
22 basically the same thing at a much higher pay scale.

23 MR. SUARAZ: And Tim, just to be clear, this is
24 something that is funded or sponsored by the Department of
25 Justice?

1 TIM: That's correct.

2 GENERAL RENO: That program had been slated,
3 apparently, to be cut when I came into office. I heard
4 about the program because I've heard good things about it
5 through District Attorneys, through U.S. Attorneys around
6 the Country. And we're trying to do whatever we can to
7 see that the funding for that program is continued.

8 One of the issues that we face in the Department
9 of Justice are significant budget cuts.

10 TIM: Right.

11 GENERAL RENO: And so, we've got to learn how to
12 do more with less. And I'm dedicated to doing that. In
13 Florida, we had to balance our budget. Deficit spending
14 was almost a crime. And when we had revenue shortfalls
15 due to the recession, we learned how to tighten our belt,
16 while at the same time doing, I think, better. And that's
17 what we're trying to do, in terms of finding how other
18 methods can be used to save money, so that we can maintain
19 the Stay in School Program, which I've just heard
20 wonderful things about.

21 TIM: Right. I guess the problem is, you know,
22 the students are basically slated for cutoff in September;
23 and right now they're scurrying around looking for other
24 employment opportunities. And, you know, while trying to
25 maintain a good GPA and a good sense of doing a good job

1 at the office.

2 GENERAL RENO: Well, as I say, we're trying to
3 find monies to keep the program going, in the face of
4 limited revenue; and hopefully, we will have it done
5 before September.

6 TIM: Yes, that would be very much appreciate.
7 Thank you.

8 MR. SUARAZ: Well Tim, not many people get an
9 opportunity to talk directly to their boss about saving
10 their jobs.

11 TIM: That's very true.

12 MR. SUARAZ: You sounded a little nervous there,
13 but we got through this.

14 TIM: Okay. Thank you very much.

15 MR. SUARAZ: Bye-bye. Cheryl's in San
16 Francisco, California. Cheryl, welcome to Talk of the
17 Nation.

18 CHERYL: Good afternoon. I just wanted to let
19 Ms. Reno know that I'm very proud to have her as Attorney
20 General, and it's refreshing to have someone with so much
21 wisdom about the future of criminal prosecution. And it's
22 a shame how many people are in prison in this Country, and
23 how violent it is. And I have one comment and a question.

24 I applaud the Congress for pressuring the
25 networks to cut down on the violence that is on

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1 television, and I'm curious if Ms. Reno would expand upon
2 the effects that she's seen that the violence on
3 television and in films is having on the children. And if
4 she thinks that that is partially why kids have guns, and
5 have no remorse.

6 GENERAL RENO: Well, as I indicated earlier, I
7 think we should send a message. I applaud what Congress
8 has done, as well. And I think we should all send a
9 message to advertisers, that we don't want to buy products
10 that advertise violence during times where it's
11 particularly available to children.

12 As I was growing up, my mother wouldn't let us
13 have a television, because she said it contributed to
14 mind rot; and I think she would expand on it now, if we
15 were being raised today. I think television can be a
16 wonderful medium. When I stop to think what it does in
17 terms of sensitizing us to violence, and think of what it
18 could do if it turned to sensitize us to what we could do
19 to reach out and help each other, it could make a
20 tremendous difference.

21 MR. SUARAZ: Jeff's in Yorktown, New York. What
22 part of the State is that in, Jeff?

23 JEFF: Oh, it's here in Westchester, just north
24 of the city.

25 MR. SUARAZ: Westchester County, okay.

1 JEFF: Ms. Reno, it's an honor to talk to you.

2 GENERAL RENO: Thank you.

3 JEFF: I agree with most of what you were
4 talking about in your opening statement, about there's
5 such a need for Federal programs to help children at all
6 stages; you know, when they're young, and to get in there
7 and stop them from being criminals. And I totally agree
8 with all that.

9 My argument would be that I think the money
10 exists. And what I mean is that we're spending so money
11 on Departments like the DEA and drug enforcement, that
12 these problems could be better solved by education. I
13 mean, locking up a drug user -- they're not a criminal. I
14 mean, I'm a medical student right now. And it's just so
15 obvious to us, that somebody that uses drugs and is
16 abusing them, putting him in jail is just a waste of time.
17 I mean, these people have medical problems, and the
18 billions of dollars we spend on drug enforcement, it just
19 seems, could be targeted so much better.

20 I just wondered if you could comment on that,
21 somehow.

22 GENERAL RENO: Well, first of all, one of the
23 things that I did upon taking office -- and I am looking
24 forward to the opportunity to work with the Director of
25 our, with our drug czar, Lee Brown -- is to analyze what

1 is working and what isn't working, in terms of efforts
2 against drugs; from the point of view of what's working in
3 other Countries, interdiction, arrest, imprisonment; to
4 see what's working and what doesn't work, and make sure
5 that we spend our dollars as wisely as possible in a
6 thoughtful, common sense way.

7 I would point out to you, however, that I have
8 been active in a number of efforts to focus on what can be
9 done to treat drug abuse. While I was a prosecutor in
10 Dade County, I was often responsible for getting people
11 into drug treatment programs. And then I was called to
12 attend their graduation. And I am amazed at the number of
13 people who have regularly, over the years, come up to tell
14 me that the reason they got into drug treatment was
15 because they got arrested and they feared jail.

16 Recently, within the last year, a man came up to
17 me in a local downtown office building and he said, "I
18 want to thank you. And I said, "What for, sir?" He said,
19 "Well, your prosecutor convicted me." I said, "Well,
20 you're the first man that ever thanked me for convicting
21 them."

22 And he said, "I had hit rock-bottom with my drug
23 problem. I'd lost my job. I didn't have insurance to
24 cover treatment. My family had left me. And I was
25 stealing to sustain my habit. Your prosecutor, rather

1 than sending me to jail, got me into a drug treatment
2 program, and I've been drug-free for 2 years. And I've
3 got my family back, and I've got a job; and I'm never
4 going to use it again. And you're the one that brought me
5 to my senses, through your prosecution."

6 So there can be an important leverage, in terms
7 of prosecution. But I think we've got to work together,
8 to develop what I call a carrot-and-stick approach, that
9 gives the people the alternative of prosecution and real
10 punishment, or working their way out of it in a rigorous
11 way that includes random drug-testing that serves as a
12 check on whether they're back-sliding or not.

13 MR. SUARAZ: But sometimes that stick, instead
14 of holding out the carrot, seems to be slammed over
15 people's head in the form of mandatory sentences, in which
16 sometimes first offenders are put away for an awful long
17 time, given the sentencing guidelines.

18 GENERAL RENO: Somebody just called me today
19 about somebody charged with possession, with growing 101
20 marijuana plants. And because it was over 100 plants, I'm
21 told, he was facing a 5-year minimum mandatory sentence.
22 He was a first offender who'd never been in trouble
23 before.

24 One of the things that I did upon taking office
25 was to direct to Deputy Attorney General to do an analysis

1 of sentencing in the United States. At the present rate
2 we are sentencing people, we're not going to have enough
3 prison cells to house them; and even if we had enough
4 prison cells, we wouldn't have enough dollars to provide
5 the operating expenses for the prisons to incarcerate
6 them.

7 Again, I draw from my experience in Florida,
8 where we were about 5 years ahead of the Federal
9 Government in the enactment of minimum mandatory sentences
10 and sentencing guidelines. Florida didn't put the dollars
11 with the laws; and as a consequence, before I left there
12 was gridlock in Florida's prison system. Very dangerous
13 offenders were being let out because others were in prison
14 on minimum mandatory sentences.

15 I want to make sure that our prison cells are
16 used to house the truly dangerous, the career criminals,
17 the recidivists, the major traffickers, the major
18 distributors, and what I call white-collar thugs, who rip
19 whole industries off or who prey on the very fragile
20 people who cannot truly take care of themselves.

21 Then I want to develop alternative sanctions,
22 that recognize that most people are coming back to the
23 community sooner, rather than later. It makes no sense to
24 see somebody sentenced to 3 years in State prison because
25 he has a drug problem and he's burglarized somebody; and

1 then pick him up without treating his drug problem, and
2 dump him back to the community where he came from, without
3 doing any aftercare or followup. Guess what he's going to
4 be doing the day after he gets out? He's probably going
5 to be using, and doing it again.

6 I'd like to see, again, the carrot-and-stick
7 approach, that gives him the alternative: Punishment? Or
8 do you want to work with us in job training and placement;
9 random drug testing; treatment; and gradually work your
10 way out of the prison, at much less cost to the taxpayers,
11 and with a much better opportunity to get off on the right
12 foot when you get out?

13 I think the whole effort requires a common
14 sense, nonpartisan approach, where people put their heads
15 together, not in political debate but in thoughtful
16 discussion, to reach solutions to problems.

17 MR. SUARAZ: Attorney General Janet Reno is my
18 guest this hour here in Studio One. (800) 989-8255 is the
19 number, to join the discussion. That's (800) 989-TALK.
20 We'll be back with more of your calls in a moment. At
21 28 minutes before the hour, you're listening to Talk of
22 the Nation, from NPR News.

23 ANNOUNCER: This is WAMU, Washington...

24 MR. SUARAZ: This is Talk of the Nation. I'm
25 Ray Suaraz. Attorney General Janet Reno is my guest this

1 hour.

2 Mr. Reno, let's take a couple of minutes now to
3 talk about some other issues affecting the Justice
4 Department. You've got a lot on your plate this week, but
5 I guess that's something that doesn't change much, from
6 week to week.

7 The other day, the Supreme Court ended its most
8 recent term and, I suppose, dumped a big pile of work in
9 the lap of your lawyers, by challenging the remaps of
10 certain Congressional districts. It seems to undercut the
11 cornerstones of the Voting Rights Act. What might that
12 mean down the road, for the Justice Department?

13 GENERAL RENO: What we're doing is, we're in the
14 processing of reviewing the opinion and making the best
15 judgment we can. It would be premature to comment,
16 really, without thoroughly evaluating just what the Court
17 is saying.

18 MR. SUARAZ: And, without a Chief of the Civil
19 Rights Division, is that made more difficult? Less
20 difficult? Is this something that you just hand off to a
21 panel of lawyers?

22 GENERAL RENO: I fortunately have a Solicitor
23 General, who is now Solicitor General after having a very
24 distinguished career that included serving as Chief of, as
25 Assistant Attorney General in charge of the Civil Rights

1 Division. Drew Days, and others, are well-versed in this
2 area. And so we will be able to thoughtfully consider it,
3 and I think, respond as the law would dictate.

4 MR. SUARAZ: Now, given that that is a fairly
5 key post, and it remains unfilled, is that something you
6 just sort of stay on war footing from week to week and try
7 to keep all your bases covered? Or do you really have to
8 hope that that is filled quickly, because you're sort of
9 running out of fingers to plug all the holes in the dike?

10 GENERAL RENO: I think I'll look on these few
11 months as we were getting staffed, because I came in,
12 obviously, later than the other Cabinet members. We will
13 look back on this time and be thankful that we don't have
14 to go through it again. It's obviously important that we
15 fill these positions. This is very important position for
16 me; one that I want to do wisely and thoughtfully, and
17 obtain an appointment that everyone can have confidence
18 in, a person that is well-versed in the law, that is a
19 good advocate, and that people will be proud of.

20 MR. SUARAZ: I understand there's also a new
21 immigration policy being developed by your office. When
22 might we see that?

23 GENERAL RENO: I think we'll see that shortly.
24 As I have said since I took office, I think immigration is
25 going to be one of the major issues I face as Attorney

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1 General. I think we will have to balance this Nation's
2 tradition of being a Nation of immigrants with the fact
3 that immigration has placed extraordinary burdens on our
4 public schools, our public hospitals, our jails, all our
5 institutions.

6 And I think it's important in that effort to,
7 first of all, select the best possible Commissioner for
8 the Immigration and Naturalization Service. I spent a lot
9 of time making a recommendation to the President. He has
10 nominated Doris Meissner, and I am so gratified by the
11 response I've received from people who I consider to be
12 thoughtful students of immigration; that they think this
13 is an excellent appointment.

14 Working with Ms. Mizener, I want to do
15 everything I can to upgrade the management of the
16 Immigration and Naturalization Services, to see that it is
17 effectively and efficiently managed; that people who come
18 in contact with it, in terms of those who it serves and
19 those who are the subject of its enforcement, can have
20 confidence in it.

21 I think it's important for the Immigration and
22 Naturalization Service to be a full partner with law
23 enforcement agencies, with the Department of State, with
24 foreign intelligence capacities of the United States
25 Government; so that we focus on immigration and deal with

1 it in the most effective manner possible.

2 MR. SUARAZ: Now, the place where you grew up,
3 in South Florida, is a place that's been very much changed
4 by immigration just in the last generation. Your adult
5 life there must have been very different even from the
6 time that you were growing up. There seems to be,
7 according to public opinion polls, growing anti-immigrant
8 sentiment. Is this something you have to keep, take into
9 account, when you promulgate a new policy? Or are you
10 just trying to lead by example?

11 GENERAL RENO: Again, I think it's, I think this
12 sentiment is the product of people who are watching public
13 institutions, the public schools, public hospitals,
14 sometimes overwhelmed. I used to sit at my desk in Miami
15 and wonder why the Federal Government wasn't being more
16 responsive to the problems of a community.

17 And so I would like to work with the
18 Commissioner, with the administration, in developing a
19 thoughtful policy that addresses the issue of who is
20 responsible in a thoughtful and responsible fashion. I
21 want to do what I can, to make sure that people who don't
22 belong in the United States don't get here in the first
23 place; and those that do get here illegally, who don't
24 belong here, who do not have a valid claim for asylum, are
25 sent home as soon as possible, consistent with the

1 Constitution.

2 MR. SUARAZ: My guest this hour, Janet Reno. We
3 have many calls coming in from across the country for Ms.
4 Reno. Annie is in Boston, Massachusetts. Welcome to the
5 program, Annie.

6 ANNIE: Hello. Good afternoon, Ms. Reno.

7 GENERAL RENO: Good afternoon.

8 ANNIE: In speaking of youths and crimes and
9 violence, an important issue to address is the role of
10 drugs. As you know, one of the strongest tools we use
11 today to combat the drug crimes is the use of asset
12 forfeiture. Youths are lured into the drug business
13 partly due to the enticing money involved. Currently, the
14 asset forfeiture program is primarily staffed by a
15 Government contractor. Roughly, \$3 billion have been
16 deposited into the asset forfeiture fund. From this fund,
17 money is put back into law enforcement, the Bureau of
18 Prisons, and community-based programs.

19 Would you care to comment on the future of this
20 program, and the importance of its role?

21 GENERAL RENO: Asset forfeitures can be a very
22 important tool. There have been criticisms of the program
23 over the past years, and what I think it is important to
24 do is to review the whole program, identify any problems
25 that might exist, and take steps to correct those

1 problems, to ensure public confidence in the whole
2 process, to ensure that it's fair to all concerned.

3 I think asset forfeiture is a remarkable tool,
4 because I use the story I heard once of a friend who
5 claimed he'd gone to play ball at a Federal prison. He
6 said the fellow there was 25 years old; he was serving a
7 5-year prison term. And he said, "Man, it's not bad. I
8 get three square meals a day; I get to play baseball; I
9 can even do a correspondence course, in terms of getting
10 my, a college degree. I've got clean sheets. Not bad.
11 And I've got all my money squirreled away, so I'll never
12 have to work again when I get out. This is just kind of
13 nice business expense for me."

14 I want to let him know that there is a greater
15 consequence for such actions.

16 MR. SUARAZ: Do we have to be careful, though,
17 that it becomes a scalpel in its application, rather than
18 a bludgeon? There have also been, for instance, apartment
19 building landlords, where some of their tenants have been
20 trading in or growing or processing illegal drugs. And
21 they've had their apartment buildings taken away, as part
22 of a conspiracy theory on the part of a prosecutor.

23 GENERAL RENO: Well, you said, should we be
24 careful it doesn't become a scalpel, rather than a
25 bludgeon. I don't want it to be a bludgeon. That's the

1 reason we're reviewing the whole program, to identify
2 problems that have existed, and to make sure that it's
3 operated in a thoughtful way, consistent with guidelines
4 that we establish, that make sure that the forfeiture is
5 commensurate with the conduct involved, and that the
6 responsibility is assessed against the person who was
7 truly culpable.

8 MR. SUARAZ: Scott's in Menlo Park, California.
9 Welcome to the program, Scott.

10 SCOTT: Thank you very much. Thank you, Ms.
11 Reno. I'm very glad that you are the Attorney General.

12 GENERAL RENO: Thank you, sir.

13 SCOTT: I wanted to know, we have been studying,
14 or at least a friend has, with the local radio show, he's
15 a researcher of political events, has brought up the
16 possible connections between the bombing of the World
17 Trade Center, being that it was right next to the Secret
18 Service garage, or at least, possibly even within the
19 garage. And also, the fact that the Bureau of Alcohol,
20 Tobacco and Firearms was in charge of the Waco, Texas
21 police action. And leading to Mr. Lloyd Bentsen, who is
22 now Secretary of Treasury, and who, evidently, is and has
23 been a member of, I'm sorry, I don't have the name, but an
24 organization that pretty much coordinates intelligence
25 regarding the hiring of Defense Department corporations -

1 - I'm sorry, I don't have the name of the thing with me.

2 MR. SUARAZ: Are you coming to a question,
3 Scott?

4 SCOTT: Considering that the Waco, Texas search
5 warrant process was initiated during the Bush
6 administration, that there's a possible destabilization of
7 Mr. Clinton's administration, that might be -- I mean, I
8 realize that this is a very, very deep, secretive type of
9 thing. But I would hope that you might have people
10 considering it, and not just a head in the sand approach
11 to such a, perhaps improbable, but a very, very, very
12 serious possibility, if it is even slightly possible.

13 GENERAL RENO: I have not heard of any such
14 possibility.

15 MR. SUARAZ: Kathleen, in Chicago, Illinois.
16 Kathleen, welcome to Talk of the Nation.

17 KATHLEEN: Hi. I'd like to ask you to address
18 the issue of drug prohibition in general. The woman at
19 the beginning of the show said that children can make
20 \$1,500 in a week, dealing drugs. Now if drugs were legal,
21 as alcohol is, the money wouldn't be there to be made.
22 And then, it wouldn't be a crime anymore. And I'd like to
23 hear you talk about that.

24 GENERAL RENO: I don't think that drugs should
25 be legalized; because I'm not a teetotaler, but I've seen

1 the damage that alcohol can do. And I think before we
2 even ever, ever thought about legalizing it, we should do
3 far more than we have to approach it from the point of
4 view of education, prevention and treatment; of focusing
5 on the major druggins and getting them put away, and kept
6 away.

7 I have seen too many people who've thanked me
8 for prosecuting them, and having that as a leverage to
9 finally force them into treatment, to suggest that it
10 doesn't work.

11 MR. SUARAZ: Is there a measure short of
12 decriminalization? Perhaps a modification of the
13 penalties, the classification of the crimes, that may do
14 more to channel behavior?

15 GENERAL RENO: Well, that's what I'm trying to
16 do. I'm trying to look at our whole drug effort; and the
17 effort both in terms of law enforcement, prevention,
18 education and treatment. And work with the druz czar to
19 develop a common sense, thoughtful evaluation of what
20 works and what doesn't work.

21 I think that the use of minimum mandatory
22 sentences for nonviolent first offenders who are not
23 significantly involved as major distributors and
24 traffickers doesn't make sense, if we don't have enough
25 cells to house truly dangerous offenders for the length of

1 time judges are sentencing them. I want to see our prison
2 cells used for the truly dangerous offenders, and the
3 major distributors.

4 I think that one of the things that we did in
5 Dade County, for example, was to establish a Drug Court,
6 that focused on nonviolent first offenders, charged with
7 the possession of a small amount of cocaine. We said,
8 look. We will divert you from the system. We will get
9 you into treatment; we will work with you in job training
10 and placement. And if you stay straight for a year, we'll
11 drop the charges against you, and help you get off to a
12 fresh start. And you won't have it hanging around your
13 neck for the rest of your life. After a certain period of
14 time, we'll even go into Court and ask the Court to seal
15 your record, if you cooperate and comply with the
16 treatment program that is provided.

17 MR. SUARAZ: Is there enough followup, though?
18 Can we look at 5 years and 6 years and 7 years later? A
19 track record of success?

20 GENERAL RENO: The program has been in effect
21 for a little over 3 years now, and it's been evaluated,
22 and I think the evaluations are coming back generally
23 positive. There's more that can be done, in terms of
24 following up for those people who don't attend the
25 program; and to make sure that they get prosecuted, and

1 that they know that there is a sanction for not having
2 followed up on the opportunity we provided them. I call
3 it the carrot-and-stick approach.

4 But that Drug Court, as we call it, has worked
5 extremely well. I think we could expand it to second and
6 third time offenders, and others who are basically
7 nonviolent offenders, who are committing cash crimes to
8 sustain their habit. Much can be done. And I think the
9 effect of prosecution, coupled with an opportunity to work
10 your way out of it through the carrot-and-stick approach
11 that I've described, can have a very effective impact on a
12 person's willingness to cooperate.

13 MR. SUARAZ: Geraldine has been very patient in
14 Seattle, Washington. Welcome to the program. Geraldine?

15 GERALDINE: Good afternoon. My comment is, I'm
16 a young mother of the nineties. And I have two sons that
17 I'm raising, and I feel that I'm doing a great job. My
18 oldest son, he's in college and he's 20; and my youngest
19 is 13.

20 And my comment is that, you know, I have raised
21 other people's children, I feel, in my neighborhood. And
22 I have been angry at the parents. And so I feel that
23 there should be a law that needs to be passed, that the
24 parents should be accountable for their children. Because
25 that's why the kids are out there doing the things, I

1 think, that they're doing; because the parents, like the
2 lady at the top of the show, that these kids bringing home
3 all this much money, and they're taking the money and
4 spending it with the kids, and then the kids go back out
5 and shoot somebody.

6 Just like a 14-year-old kid got shot up here
7 today. And that got me upset, because my 13-year-old kid
8 is out today doing something with the Seattle Supersonics,
9 and he could be coming home and here is a kid trying to
10 impress a gang member, to be in one. And he's a target.

11 So I'm saying, where is the parents of these
12 kids, that's out there freely running around the streets?
13 They should be responsible. Parents should be
14 accountable, just like when that parent left their little
15 kids at home, and there is a law for that. There should
16 be a law for being responsible for your children. And I'm
17 a parent myself.

18 And I feel that, if I let my kids run up and
19 down the street to make crimes, I should go to jail. You
20 know? Because I don't want my kids, that I'm raising
21 right now, out hurting no one. So I feel every parent
22 should be responsible. And I'm tired of taking the
23 responsibility for raising other kids in my neighborhood.
24 Even though I have to do it, because I don't want them to
25 go out and hurt no one.

1 MR. SUARAZ: Well, Geraldine, the Attorney
2 General does want to talk back to you on this issue.

3 GENERAL RENO: Geraldine, I applaud you, because
4 I think raising children is the most rewarding thing in
5 the world to do; but I think it's the single most
6 difficult thing I know to do. About 8 years ago, a friend
7 died, leaving me as the legal guardian of her 15-year-old
8 twins, a boy and a girl. And I've learned an awful lot
9 about raising children in the last 8 years, and it takes
10 hard work and love, intelligence, and some luck too.

11 I have tried to devise a statute in my mind that
12 could hold parents responsible. But I'm haunted, every
13 time I come up against it, with the memory of one of the
14 first children I ever prosecuted after I became a
15 prosecutor, back in the early seventies.

16 He was a 15-year-old. His mother was a single
17 parent, terribly hard-working. She took, I think, two
18 buses across town to her job each day. But each morning,
19 she got her children dressed, good breakfast, got them off
20 to school; worked with them at homework at night; made
21 sure that a member of the family, an older member of the
22 family, was there with them in the afternoon until she
23 could get home.

24 And I don't remember now what the combination
25 was, but one son was an officer in the Air Force, another

1 was a doctor, a daughter was married to the lawyer. And
2 here came the 15-year-old, charged with an armed robbery.
3 And she was just in tears. She didn't know what had gone
4 wrong. He'd gotten in with the wrong crowd; and she was
5 just heartbroken. And that lady had tried her level best;
6 and had done a magnificent job with 3 out of the 4
7 children.

8 And I don't think she can be prosecuted, but
9 I've been trying to figure out how to hold the neglectful
10 parents responsible and follow up on cases of child abuse
11 and neglect.

12 MR. SUARAZ: Geraldine, it's not as easy as just
13 passing a law, I think, is the bottom line. Thanks a lot
14 for your call.

15 My guest this hour, Janet Reno, the Attorney
16 General of the United States. And Stacy is in Oakland,
17 California. Stacy?

18 STACY: Hi. Good afternoon. First I want to
19 say how proud I am that you are our Attorney General, Ms.
20 Reno. It's a real honor for me. You seem to come in the
21 tradition of Earl Warren, who after all, started out as a
22 prosecutor in Alameda County, and we're very proud of that
23 tradition.

24 I'm an Assistant Public Defender here, and have
25 seen the same thing that you saw as a prosecutor. And I

1 think many people in the criminal justice system have come
2 to two conclusions, that the system is failing for two
3 fundamental reasons: And one is a lack of confidence in
4 policy department; and the other is a failure of having
5 programs available, which you've talked about extensively
6 on this show.

7 One of the things that we see in our county is
8 that a lot of the money coming in from the Federal
9 Government for establishing narcotics task forces in
10 various policy agencies, and these are the very agencies
11 where we get a lot of our Malice Green and Rodney King
12 type of cases. In specific, in general, it engenders a
13 great amount of reservation about trust between the people
14 and their police department.

15 My question is this: Is there a way of
16 expanding what you call the carrot-and-stick approach from
17 individuals to communities? So that, for every dollar
18 that is given to a city or a county or a local Government
19 from the Federal end, dollar for dollar would be given for
20 a drug treatment program, a job training program? And in
21 fact, there would be a requirement that a community cannot
22 receive any more money for law enforcement, which
23 obviously there's a need for, unless they develop programs
24 to meet the needs of why crime is being committed. Is
25 this a viable policy?

1 GENERAL RENO: I think so. First of all, let me
2 address the issue of lack of confidence in policy
3 departments.

4 I've had an opportunity now to visit some
5 communities around the Nation. I saw a variety of police
6 department in Miami and Dade County. Some of the most
7 exciting things that I see underway now are being done on
8 the part of policemen who care deeply about their
9 communities and the people in the communities. The whole
10 concept of community policing is, to me, very exciting.

11 We helped to establish a program in Miami where
12 we had a community friendly, highly-respected policy
13 officer team up with a social worker, a public health
14 nurse and a community organizer in one neighborhood that
15 had been plagued by youth gangs, crime and drugs. And
16 they have been so successful. The last I heard, they were
17 talking about replicating it in other areas, because the
18 police were so pleased with it.

19 And so, in many instances, police are at the
20 cutting edge of the really good things that are happening
21 in communities, and those police, I think, are doing a
22 tremendous amount to give the public confidence in their
23 efforts, and in terms of what they can do to prevent
24 crime.

25 In terms of what I'd like to see happen is, I'm

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1 trying to work with other Federal agencies, with Secretary
2 Shalala and the Department of Health and Human Services,
3 Governor Riley in the Department of Education, Mr.
4 Cisneros in HUD, to bring Federal programs together, so we
5 can focus them on a community and work with the community
6 to develop community needs.

7 Your idea of an incentive is excellent; the idea
8 of communities identifying private funds, or foundation
9 funds, and leveraging those for additional dollars could
10 also be exciting. I think much can be done, if we develop
11 a true partnership between the Federal Government and
12 local communities.

13 MR. SUARAZ: Laura Kate, in San Diego,
14 California, welcome to the program.

15 LAURA: Actually, the lady who just spoke before
16 addressed my issue, that I wanted to give to you. I'm
17 really glad for this opportunity to hear more about your
18 policies, Attorney General Reno. And I wanted to just
19 keep it to a comment. That I'm really grateful to see the
20 Justice Department coming forward on the subject on the
21 future of America's children. And I'm waiting for the
22 Legislative and the Executive branches to make this an
23 issue of National defense. I think it should be the
24 patriotic duty of every adult in the United States to take
25 a personal interest in the welfare of a child at risk.

1 And thank you very much.

2 GENERAL RENO: There's so much that can be done.
3 Interestingly enough, I just had a copy of a letter from
4 Secretary Aspin of the Department of Defense, announcing
5 some expenditures from the Department of Defense on youth
6 initiatives.

7 I would love to see our young people, through
8 the National Service Corps proposed by the President,
9 develop opportunities, I'd like to see us develop
10 opportunities for our young people to serve our Country in
11 wonderful ways in which they can participate to help
12 rebuild communities.

13 I have challenged lawyers not just to take cases
14 to Court to protect somebody, but most lawyers who are
15 successful, keep their clients out of Court. They solve
16 their clients problems without going to Court. And I
17 think it would be wonderful if lawyers who wanted to do
18 pro bono service could adopt a block, where there were
19 children at risk, and work with the community in designing
20 programs that could benefit them.

21 We have DEA agents, U.S. Marshals and FBI agents
22 who are working in programs in children's schools
23 throughout the Washington area, and tutoring programs.
24 Each American can make a difference.

25 I saw an 84-year-old man who volunteered 3

1 mornings a week, 3 days a week, for a first-grade teacher;
2 and the first-grade teacher said the gifted children
3 couldn't wait until he got to them, because he challenged
4 them far more than she could. And the children with
5 learning disabilities couldn't wait for him, because he
6 was so patient and so wonderful and so kind.

7 No matter who you are, you can make a difference
8 in children's lives in America.

9 MR. SUARAZ: Ms. Reno, thanks for coming to our
10 studio today.

11 GENERAL RENO: Thank you.

12 MR. SUARAZ: Janet Reno is the Attorney General
13 of the United States.

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