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SPEECH BY
THE HON. JANET RENO,
UNITED STATES ATTORNEY GENERAL,
before the
NATIONAL PRESS CLUB

National Press Club
13th Floor Ballroom
529 14th Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C.

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(1:08 p.m.)

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(Applause.)

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GENERAL RENO: Thank you, very much. It is a very great honor to be here today, considering the family from whence I came, especially. And I would like to share with you a scene that I will never forget that summarizes much of my feeling about where we go in America and what we do.

It was on the afternoon, the late afternoon, of April the 19th of this year. I walked into a press conference in which television cameramen, commentators, reporters, looked at me as if they were a bunch of hungry wolves. Their questions came fast, furious, angry. Their faces were angry as they pounded the questions at me. What spin do you think people are going to put on this? How will this be perceived? Is your job on the line? They almost roared at me.

But about halfway through that press conference I suddenly started looking at faces that had changed, and there was care, there was understanding, there was sensitivity, there was support, there was encouragement. The questions were still hard questions, but they weren't angry questions, because it was almost as if we had become together immersed in one horrible tragedy, to which in many cases there were no answers.

1 But we still had to ask the questions, to
2 understand this mind that had caused this. There was no
3 longer competition between that press corps out there and
4 me, but we were trying to understand together. We were
5 trying to understand what each one of us would have done
6 had they been standing in my shoes. We were trying to
7 understand life in all its complexities.

8 For as long as I live, as I deal with the press,
9 I will never forget that afternoon. And it carried me
10 through into the evening, to other commentators. I was
11 encouraged by the spirit that went with me. They weren't
12 pulling any punches, but there was a spirit of let's talk
13 together, let's question together. You be accountable but
14 let's probe, let's try to understand, let's get to the
15 ultimate truth.

16 And by the end of the evening, I was having my
17 hardest question asked, by a man who came in beforehand
18 and said may I get you a cup of tea, and you need some
19 lemon. And Mr. Koppel --

20 (Laughter.)

21 GENERAL RENO: -- asked me whether I would
22 resign. But I know why he did it, and I received the
23 nicest letter from him later.

24 We can ask the hard questions about life and
25 about public officials performance, and we can do it in a

1 thoughtful and constructive way that achieves the two
2 goals that we share: One, a true, free, and informed
3 press; and two, a government that is truly a government of
4 the people, by the people, and for the people, in which
5 its public officials are accountable to the people.

6 I knew before, and I know better now, that I
7 must continue to be as open as I possibly can. I am very
8 proud of what our office of public affairs has done in
9 terms of trying to respond to your inquiries. Carl Stern
10 is a wonderful person to have around me because I know
11 that he is going to furnish you the truth. We have
12 hotlines, and I am about coming close to giving you my
13 home phone number.

14 (Laughter.)

15 GENERAL RENO: Because I have discovered it
16 wouldn't do any good anyway. Because I'm not there.

17 (Laughter.)

18 GENERAL RENO: I have asked Carl to try to set
19 up regular weekly meetings with the press. I am trying to
20 be as accountable as I can.

21 The group of experts that we have assembled
22 together, together with the Department of Treasury, met
23 today to begin the review of Waco. We want to have
24 independent, focused, scrutiny on this issue. We want to
25 be accountable for what the Department of Justice has done

1 over the years in INSLAW.

2 We have asked for responses by August 1st for
3 suggestions and ideas and thoughts that people have as to
4 further inquiries that should be made. We want to do
5 everything we can to work with the press of America to
6 explore your policy papers on maintaining an informed
7 democracy and on making the Department of Justice as open
8 and as accessible to the people as possible.

9 I come from a State that has probably the most
10 open Government in the country. We have a sunshine law,
11 we have cameras in the courtroom, we have a strict public
12 records law, and I think if there is any reason why I
13 stand here before you as Attorney General today, it is
14 because I had to account to the people. I had to be open.
15 I had to let them know why I did things and why I didn't
16 do things. And I want to try to continue to do that,
17 working with you in the Department of Justice.

18 That is oftentimes a difficult role because
19 there are too many of you in this room who have heard me
20 say: No comment, that's a pending investigation; no
21 comment, we're going to litigate that case in the courts,
22 not in the headlines; no comment, but I will comment when
23 the matter is over, and I will be accountable.

24 I want to be accountable to Congress. I want to
25 be able to work with staff and go to the Hill and not have

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1 any pride of protocol in developing a good spirited
2 discussion between both Republicans and Democrats about so
3 many matters that concern this entire Nation. I want to
4 try to be as direct and understandable as possible.

5 I don't do spin. I want to try to use small,
6 old words that everyone understands. I want to say no
7 when I can't do something. I want to be as honest and
8 direct as I can.

9 And people say well, what is going to happen? I
10 got elected five times trying to be as honest and direct
11 as I can, and what the American people, I think, want more
12 than anything else in the world are not shaded and false
13 promises, but honest, candid, direct answers as to what
14 you can do and can't do. They appreciate I don't know
15 when you don't know. They appreciate yes to a long
16 question, when yes will suffice more than three sentences.

17 I want to provide a vision of where we need to
18 go in America, but put in terms that everybody can
19 understand. Alphabet agencies, Roman numerals, jargons --
20 the jargon of the appropriations process I'm still having
21 trouble understanding.

22 (Laughter.)

23 GENERAL RENO: And you haven't helped me very
24 much.

25 (Laughter.)

1 GENERAL RENO: I want to be a good manager, and
2 being a good manager is not sometimes the most popular
3 thing to do, particularly when you are managing a
4 department of 95,000 people with law enforcement,
5 prosecution, prisons, and immigration all part of its
6 responsibility.

7 I want to make sure that the American people get
8 every return on their dollars. I want to understand who
9 is doing what in the Department of Justice and who is
10 doing what in U.S. attorney's offices around the country.
11 I want to approach everything in the department with one
12 overriding question: What's the right thing to do?

13 That is not an easy answer sometimes. Harry
14 Truman said it is easy to do the right thing. It is awful
15 tough to know what the right thing to do is. But we learn
16 what the right thing to do is by going back to that
17 afternoon when the anger faded and the questions continued
18 to come, but came with thoughtfulness, with concern, with
19 care, as we all tried to reach what the truth was, what
20 the right thing to do was.

21 I want to be myself, and it doesn't help to have
22 something like Doonesbury start the morning.

23 (Laughter.)

24 GENERAL RENO: I'm sure God is at this point
25 very angry with Gary Trudeau.

1 (Laughter.)

2 GENERAL RENO: Because I am not anything
3 different than what you see. I am a 54-year-old awkward
4 old maid who is not a great speaker. I can be impatient,
5 I do have a temper, my mother accused me of mumbling, I am
6 not a good housekeeper, I don't put much priority on
7 housekeeping, I have troubling delegating sometimes, and
8 that becomes difficult when you come from an office of 900
9 to 95,000.

10 (Laughter.)

11 GENERAL RENO: People have told me already in my
12 office that I am too trusting about Washington. My fifth
13 grade teacher said I was bossy, my family thinks I am
14 opinionated and sometimes arrogant and would be happy to
15 supply you with other warts that I have, too.

16 (Laughter.)

17 GENERAL RENO: But in trying to speak in simple
18 terms, in trying to be open, in trying to be myself, you
19 sometimes make it difficult. You created a myth of this
20 lady from the swamps. And it's fascinating to watch how
21 you created it from an obituary written by Marguerita
22 Fishner, suddenly spun 2 months later into the leads of so
23 many stories around the Nation.

24 You've got to make sure that you dispel the myth
25 and engage in revisionist history before it gets too far

1 down the line. You have got to ask me hard questions.
2 You have got to help puncture the myth. But, as I told
3 Meg Greenfield, when you are about to do it, please call
4 me the day before so I don't get hit up on the side of the
5 head with a 2 by 4 without knowing it's coming.

6 You make it very difficult because too often you
7 try to make somebody something they are not. I go to a
8 television station here, one of the network stations, and
9 I am told I just have to put on makeup. And I said but I
10 don't wear that stuff. Well, you have to have your hair
11 done. Well, I don't do it. I just look myself. Well, it
12 won't look that good on TV -- like I can't go on their TV
13 network unless I look good.

14 (Laughter, applause.)

15 GENERAL RENO: So as not to offend the person
16 who did my makeup --

17 (Laughter.)

18 GENERAL RENO: -- and fixed my hair, I want to
19 tell you that I never got so many glowing comments, not
20 about the stuff and substance I said on the Brinkley Show,
21 but how magnificent my hair looked.

22 (Laughter.)

23 GENERAL RENO: You make it very difficult to
24 talk about real substance when you come back to me with
25 your first question being, "But Ms. Reno, aren't people

1 going to say that you're soft on crime?" Why would they
2 say I'm soft on crime after I've just got through saying I
3 want to put the career criminal away and keep them away
4 and let there be truth in sentencing?

5 They asked me that question without asking me,
6 well, what about zero to 3? Doctor So and So says that
7 that might not be the most formative years. Nobody has
8 asked me much about the stuff and substance of a
9 children's agenda. They've just asked me how will it
10 play? How will it spin? We've got to get out of the spin
11 business and into the substance business.

12 (Applause.)

13 GENERAL RENO: You love to stir up fights. A
14 member of my family very close to me, happening to be one
15 of your number, reminds me of what you all do. You try to
16 get Bernie Nussbaum and I to pick a fight with each other.
17 Well, first of all, I decided that I was bigger than
18 Bernie so that that wasn't going to work.

19 (Laughter.)

20 GENERAL RENO: But now, I've decided that Bernie
21 Nussbaum is one of the sweetest guys in the whole wide
22 world, and you just have got to stop making us appear to
23 be fighting, because we are not. And as far as the
24 President of the United States is concerned, I met him for
25 the first time on February the 9th, and I was impressed

1 with him being one of the most intelligent, caring, warm,
2 and informed people that I had met in most of my life, and
3 I think that 5 and 10 times over now, so let's get rid of
4 the fights.

5 (Applause.)

6 GENERAL RENO: You love shorthand issues. Even
7 the print media loves to shorthand the issues. You want
8 instant answers, you want instant solutions, you
9 contribute to the hype and the spin. You discourage.
10 People try to involve a wide range of people in a careful
11 search for important positions, and then they get spit up
12 and chewed and spit out, right in front of all the
13 American people. And you cause people to be afraid to
14 try, and afraid to put their name in the hat.

15 When a person fails, their failure is
16 disastrously portrayed across the papers and the
17 televisions of this country, so people think why should I
18 get into that business? And then, if they do get into
19 that business, they discover rather than really trying,
20 rather than really trying to achieve a vision of something
21 that matters to this Nation, it's better to do it in 30
22 second sound bites and with carefully crafted press
23 statements that go to small issues and not the great
24 vision that's necessary for America.

25 You confuse, as I have mentioned, with your

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1 alphabet jargon, with the failure sometimes to describe
2 arcane processes. You get too specialized. I am
3 surrounded by Department of Justice correspondents, and it
4 is difficult to try to get them to look beyond the
5 Department of Justice to children's issues, to issues that
6 involve us all. It is difficult to get them to start
7 linking with education, with the Department of Labor, with
8 HUD, with the Department of HHS. And yet we all have got
9 to do that.

10 One of the things that we are trying to do is to
11 reach out to other agencies and form real partnerships.
12 I, too long, would spend time at meetings in Miami where
13 there would be five different Federal agencies
14 represented, five different agencies doing five different
15 things, never talking to each other, never coordinating
16 their programs so that they got the best return on the
17 dollars and the best impact on what they were trying to do
18 anywhere.

19 We've got to begin in Washington by linking
20 ourselves together and using the Federal Resources in ways
21 that can make a difference. We are doing that now in the
22 area of youth violence, where we have had several meetings
23 in terms of trying to develop both a criminal justice
24 response, a public health response, and an educational
25 response to youth violence that can make a difference.

1 We are trying to do it in terms of the whole
2 problem of immigration cannot be focused in one isolated
3 way, but has to be linked with the Department of State
4 with diplomatic initiatives, with economic issues, with
5 law enforcement issues, because they all come together as
6 one whole, and all of us have got to see beyond the bounds
7 of our narrowly focused departments and link these issues
8 together.

9 We've got to work with local law enforcement in
10 linking Federal agencies too often going in different
11 directions at the same time with local law enforcement so
12 that we use the limited dollars we have in the wisest way
13 possible.

14 Too many of you specialize in Washington, and
15 you don't know what is happening in the communities
16 throughout America. You do not even know what is
17 happening in your own community, because too many of you
18 go out Massachusetts Avenue or Connecticut Avenue and
19 never go the other way, and never go to that elementary
20 school where children were afraid after the drive-by
21 shooter, don't go to that area around the swimming pool,
22 don't become absorbed in your community and understand the
23 strength, the diversity, and the magnificence of so many
24 people out there.

25 Recently, I was asked by a reporter who knew I

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1 was going to another city, "Are you going to do anything
2 newsworthy when you go to Boston?"

3 (Laughter.)

4 GENERAL RENO: I said, "I'm going to Boston to
5 talk to people about what I've been talking about, and I'm
6 going to learn from people and I'm going to meet people
7 and I'm going to meet students and business leaders and
8 other people who care, and I am going to draw strength and
9 knowledge from them.

10 I did it in Miami. There was never any press
11 around. I would go to different groups, speak to
12 different groups, speak to elementary schools and senior
13 citizens groups. There is such strength, there is such
14 knowledge there of people who want to provide a give and
15 take, and somehow or another the press and the media of
16 America has got to get out beyond, beyond the city halls,
17 beyond the county commissions, the State legislatures, and
18 the capitol, out to the people of America again.

19 I know you. I spent my mornings waking up at
20 about 6:00 in the morning to a man who would start at 5:30
21 in the morning with a list, calling one police agency
22 after another, one source of news after another. "Hi,
23 this is Reno of the Herald. Do you have anything going?"
24 He never spun it. He never engaged in hype.

25 But then there was somebody else who was part

1 and parcel of my life who appeared on the front page of
2 the Miami News in her mother's blue linin dress carrying
3 her mother's gloves wearing a phoney diamond ring and
4 wearing her mother's floppy hat. And the headline said,
5 "Driving a borrowed Cadillac, wearing a phoney diamond
6 ring, I bought baby's for the Kefauver Committee."

7 That was my mother, who made news sometimes more
8 often than she reported news. I would not like to be on
9 the receiving end of some of my brothers columns. I am
10 told that I should expect to be.

11 (Laughter.)

12 GENERAL RENO: My grandfather was the chief
13 photographer of the Herald, who photographed Miami
14 becoming a great city, and to look at those pictures
15 represent a history and a keen sense of people and place
16 that is remarkable. And I have an aunt who was a music
17 critic for the Herald, who I think helped bring Miami into
18 prominence as a great city of the arts.

19 I know you. And I know that you care so
20 passionately about your country, about your constitution,
21 about the First Amendment. But I know more than anything
22 else, because I have known you, that you care passionately
23 about the people of America and how we reach the solution
24 to the problems that we all face in this extraordinarily
25 complex time.

1 I would like to issue you a challenge, a
2 challenge to all Americans. A challenge to Congress, a
3 challenge to defense attorneys, a challenge to all who
4 have traditionally been at each end of the spectrum of
5 debate. Let us go back to the last half of that press
6 conference, where the anger faded, where the questions
7 continued as hard as ever, but were caring, thoughtful,
8 probing questions. Let us continue to be accountable to
9 each other.

10 Let us be objective and honest, and understand
11 that this is the most complex time in the history of the
12 world. Our borders have shrunk. There are incredible
13 burdens placed on everyone. There is poverty amid
14 extraordinary plenty. Let us look beyond our narrow
15 worlds of newspaper reporter, Attorney General, and
16 understand that the solutions to our problems are going to
17 be achieved in common sense ways, with small, old values.

18 It is like raising children. It is the most
19 difficult job of all. It takes common sense, hard work,
20 intelligence, and an awful lot of love. You've got to
21 punish but punish fairly. You've got to make sure the
22 punishment is carried out. But you've got to also
23 understand that as you punish you've got to provide a
24 nurturing environment where that child can grow as a
25 strong, constructive human being.

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1 We've got to respect others. Too often in these
2 last years we have come to disrespect our colleagues,
3 disrespect the opposition. We can disagree and still be
4 remarkably civil and caring.

5 We should not spend more than we have, and we
6 should understand that if we've got one electric frying
7 pan, we don't have to get another version of the electric
8 frying pan and have two different systems when one can do
9 just as well. We have to build government at every level
10 in the right way.

11 And most of all, we've got to encourage everyone
12 to public service. As you write that article damning the
13 public servant, cast it in terms that still creates in the
14 young people of America a feeling that they want to come
15 to Washington, that they want to go to the State capitol,
16 that they want to serve in every way they possibly can.

17 Somehow or another, working together, we can
18 bring the magic of this city back to America, the magic of
19 public service back to America, the magic of serving the
20 people back to America.

21 Thank you.

22 (Applause.)

23 MODERATOR: We have a lot of questions on
24 violence in the streets because of the recent outbreak in
25 Washington. What are your recommendations for solving the

1 problems of guns and violence in our society?

2 GENERAL RENO: First of all, I think we have got
3 to have truth in sentencing for the violent offender, that
4 we've got to make sure that we have enough prison cells in
5 America, both in local, State, and Federal jails, to house
6 the dangerous offender, the career criminal, for the
7 length of time the judges are sentencing them.

8 Nothing is more frustrating to a local
9 prosecutor than to see a dangerous offender prosecuted,
10 tried, convicted without a plea bargaining, and then see
11 them out in 20 to 30 percent of the sentence because we
12 don't have enough prison cells to house them because too
13 many of those prison cells are being currently utilized by
14 nonviolent offenders who are there on minimum mandatory
15 sentences.

16 We've got to make sense of our correctional
17 system, and I'm working on that with national attorneys
18 general, National District Attorneys Association
19 officials, trying to develop a rational use of the limited
20 resources we have.

21 At the same time, we need to focus on juveniles.
22 And I think it is imperative that we sent a message to all
23 our young people that poverty, broken families, and all
24 that came before is no excuse for putting a gun up besides
25 somebody's head and hurting them or killing them. We have

1 got to develop programs that provide --

2 (Applause.)

3 GENERAL RENO: -- punishment that fits the
4 crime, but at the same time recognizing that in many of
5 these instances these children are coming back to the
6 community, and we've got to bring them back in the most
7 effective manner possible.

8 I had proposed in Miami a system whereby if a
9 14-year-old committed an armed robbery we would indict him
10 as an adult, but we would transfer the case back to the
11 juvenile court judge having jurisdiction and he could say
12 young man, you're going to the jail for a year. This kid
13 had been telling the police officers that nothing was
14 going to happen to him because nothing happened to anybody
15 in the juvenile justice system, and so suddenly he gets
16 another thought coming.

17 But then, let the judge say but I'm going to
18 suspend entry of the sentence if you agree to enter into
19 this performance agreement with me that provides that you
20 bring up your reading level, gives the certain specified
21 conditions that have to be followed. If a kid has a drug
22 problem, treatment has to follow. He has to comply. And
23 if he complies, we will get him off on the right foot, but
24 if he messes up he knows that the jail is sitting right
25 there waiting for him.

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1 We've got to have the continuity of care that
2 makes a difference. One of the problems with most
3 juvenile justice systems in the world is that they put the
4 child in a training school for, say, 3 months or 6 months,
5 and then too often they pick up the kid and dump him right
6 back into the community where the problems started in the
7 first place, without after care, without followup, without
8 somebody there supervising him and giving him another
9 chance.

10 It is clear to me, however, that what we are
11 seeing, that violence in America, particularly amongst our
12 youth, is the symptom of a deeper problem in society.
13 Drugs, teen pregnancy, youth gangs, dropouts, the
14 increasing number of children who are in the ranks of the
15 homeless, are all evidence to me of the single greatest
16 problem that has faced America since World War II, and
17 that is that too often we have forgotten and neglected our
18 children.

19 When 21 percent of American children live in
20 poverty, a far greater percentage than any other age
21 group, you begin to see the dimension of the problem. I
22 think we need to understand that there is no one key
23 intervention point where you can more effectively prevent
24 violence than any other. But we have got to reduce teen
25 pregnancy, make sure that we provide adequate medical care

1 in preventative terms for our children, including
2 immunizations.

3 When a significant number of children in
4 Washington age 2 are not receiving immunizations, that is
5 one of the stupidest lack of expenditures we can make.
6 For every dollar spent for immunization we save ourselves
7 from epidemics and the cost associated with it. We've got
8 to make sure that every child in America has safe,
9 constructive, educare.

10 Every child development specialist that I've
11 talked to, and as I mentioned earlier, no reporter who has
12 talked with me has ever questioned these facts, that the
13 most formative time in a person's life is 0 to 3. A child
14 learns the concept of reward and punishment and develops a
15 conscience. 50 percent of all learned human response is
16 learned in the first year of life. What good is it going
17 to do to build prisons 18 years from now unless we give
18 that child a structure, an environment in which he can
19 learn reward and punishment and develop a conscience so
20 that he knows not to hurt people?

21 We've got to develop programs after school and
22 in the evenings for our children to keep them occupied.
23 We've got to focus on truancy prevention programs. We've
24 got to make our educational system fit with our job
25 training and placement system. Right now, you see a kid

1 with a summer job, he may be chipping paint on a curb.
2 That summer job does not in any way tie into what he might
3 anticipate in terms of career goals. We should take 7th
4 graders, or whatever age the educators suggest, and say we
5 are going to do a real thorough evaluation of aptitude and
6 interest. Then, we are going to have a counselor link
7 summer job programs with school work experience programs,
8 school educational programs, so that if that child follows
9 that track he knows that he will graduate with a skill
10 that can enable him to earn a living wage.

11 We've got to challenge our children to public
12 service through the National Service Corps and other
13 efforts. Just look around this Nation at the monuments
14 built by the young men in the civilian conservation corps
15 and you see what the youth of America can do if they are
16 given a chance to serve. We can do so much, if we stop
17 focusing on our narrow little realm, the police on the
18 police effort, the prosecutor on the prosecutor's efforts,
19 and we start looking at the whole of human life in this
20 broad context, understanding how we can each make a
21 difference in providing support along the way.

22 (Applause.)

23 MODERATOR: Is gun control part of your method
24 for controlling youth violence?

25 GENERAL RENO: When I was in Florida, and I

1 still believe it very strongly, and I haven't figured
2 out -- I have asked the Deputy Attorney General to make
3 recommendations to me as to appropriate Federal strategies
4 that could either supplement or achieve this so that I
5 might make appropriate recommendations, but I advocated
6 one uniform State licensing law that required that anybody
7 who possessed any kind of weapon wherever they possessed
8 it had to demonstrate that they knew how to safely and
9 lawfully use the weapon and that they were capable of
10 doing it.

11 The license should not be in any way arbitrary.
12 The person would obviously have to be trained, as they
13 were trained to drive an automobile. If anyone possessed
14 a weapon and demonstrated an inability to safely and
15 lawfully use it, I would advocate immediate revocation of
16 the license. I would advocate I don't think that
17 youngsters can safely and lawfully use a weapon so I would
18 not make licensing available, and then for anyone who
19 possessed a gun without a license I would go after them a
20 vigorously as possible, hoping that the legislature would
21 impose for the first offender, if there was no violence
22 involved, serious community service, and advanced and more
23 severe penalties for second time offenders.

24 (Applause.)

25 MODERATOR: What is the current Department of

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1 Justice philosophy and plan of action for working with the
2 Office of the National Drug Czar to fight drug crime?

3 GENERAL RENO: I just went to Dr. Brown's
4 swearing in. When -- I had urged the Governor to appoint
5 Dr. Brown because I've already -- always been impressed
6 with his wonderful work, particularly in terms of
7 community policing. I think he understands the balance
8 between punishment and prevention and that both are
9 absolutely necessary, and that he is committed to the
10 fight to do something sensible and a common sense approach
11 to dealing with the drug problem.

12 He spoke magnificently today in the Rose Garden
13 just before I came over here. We have already discussed
14 joint efforts, and I want to work with him in every way
15 possible. I think he can bring a great force to bear in
16 ensuring an effective, sensible, coordination of the drug
17 enforcement and education, prevention, and abuse efforts
18 in America.

19 MODERATOR: You've talked about the importance
20 of prevention of crime. But at this point, do you oppose
21 building more prisons to house the offenders that are now
22 in the system?

23 GENERAL RENO: I support building enough prisons
24 in the United States, both at the State and Federal level,
25 to house the truly dangerous offenders, the career

1 criminals, the people who commit two and three and four
2 armed robberies, the dangerous murderers, for the length
3 of time the judges are sentencing them.

4 We have not completed our study to understand
5 whether there are sufficient prisons to do that. If there
6 are not, I think more should be built. But I have the
7 sense that if we focused on the truly dangerous offenders,
8 the major traffickers and distributors -- the white collar
9 thugs, as I call them, who rob whole industries blind and
10 deal with the oftentimes very fragile constituents that
11 cannot take of themselves or protect themselves from the
12 con artist. I think we ought to have enough cells for
13 them.

14 But many other offenders should be in prison.
15 Most criminologists tell me that what is more important
16 for these offenders who are going to be returning to the
17 community is that the time -- the certainty of the
18 sentence is almost more important than the length of the
19 sentence. And what I'd like to see happen is the
20 development of alternative sanctions that operated on the
21 carrot and stick approach, similar to what we did in Miami
22 with the drug court.

23 Suppose we have a person who has a second
24 offense, a burglary of a store done to get cash to sustain
25 his drug habit. Too often now he may be sent to prison.

1 He doesn't receive drug treatment. He'll get out in 20 to
2 30 percent of the sentence because there are not enough
3 prison cells. He's right back out on the street doing the
4 same thing again.

5 I'd like to interrupt that by telling him, look,
6 you're sentenced to 3 years. You are going to serve 10
7 percent of that sentence for sure. But at the end of the
8 10 percent of the sentence you can work your way out. We
9 will get you into drug treatment. We will get you detoxed
10 and stabilized, get you into residential nonsecure which
11 is far less costly than prison.

12 You will have to agree to random drug testing
13 throughout this whole process. We will get you finally
14 into aftercare and into a job, and then we will monitor
15 your performance through random drug testing for the 3
16 years of the sentence. If you mess up, start using again,
17 commit another crime, we're going to bounce you back into
18 prison so quick it will make your head swim.

19 If we use that type of approach, if we monitor
20 that person, I think we'll stand a far better chance of
21 not doing it again.

22 MODERATOR: What is your position on legalizing
23 drugs? Do you favor decriminalizing any categories of
24 drug offenses?

25 GENERAL RENO: No, I don't.

1 (Laughter, applause.)

2 MODERATOR: What emphasis do you intend to give
3 to the white collar crime that you've just mentioned?

4 GENERAL RENO: One of the points that we saw
5 again and again in Miami, because we tried to focus on
6 white collar crime that affected entire industries or
7 affected people such as elderly people who were victims of
8 boilermaker operations or people who were victims of the
9 violation of fiduciary duties such as lawyers and others,
10 we tried to focus on that type of crime because it became
11 very apparent to me that people can steal a lot more
12 through white collar crime than they can by holding a gun
13 up to somebody.

14 And I think what we have got to do is
15 differentiate between the paperhanger, the con artist, the
16 person who's going to do it again and again, and go after
17 them as vigorously as possible, while at the same time
18 recognizing that there are others who, for a variety of
19 circumstances, did it as a one-shot deal, and then for
20 them, where it doesn't affect a substantial number of
21 people, the classic example being the secretary who steals
22 from her boss because her husband has left her and she
23 can't pay the rent and she's never done it before and
24 she's been a good employee for 10 years. For them, we try
25 to divert them into diversion programs that often prove

1 effective.

2 MODERATOR: We've had a number of questions on
3 the death penalty and your position. I believe it is well
4 known that you oppose the death penalty. How do you
5 square that with being tough on crime?

6 GENERAL RENO: I oppose -- personally -- oppose
7 the death penalty because I think that the whole purpose
8 of law as I know it is to value human life. And for
9 government to legally take human life is inconsistent with
10 that ultimate approach.

11 Secondly, most people when I asked, and I always
12 made a point of asking new applicants who came to the
13 office, I was the final interviewer, and I would ask them
14 what they thought of the death penalty. It was also
15 always interesting because they thought that they had to
16 be fierce, tough, prosecutors and they'd say well, I'm for
17 it. And I would say well, why are you for it? And I was
18 amazed at the number of people who knee-jerk and say that
19 they are for the death penalty and can't articulate why. I
20 think before government carries out the death penalty it
21 ought to have some darn good studies and rational reasons
22 for doing so.

23 Thirdly, much of -- all the punishment can be
24 arbitrary. The father can spank one brother harder than
25 the other but he can make up with it by kindness and

1 consideration in the weeks to come. You have mitigation,
2 you have parole and clemency, but once that death penalty
3 is carried out there is no way to make up for arbitrary
4 action and the imposition of the death penalty.

5 Finally, I think that the only purpose for the
6 death penalty, as I see it, is vengeance, pure and simple
7 vengeance. I always used to say while my mother was alive
8 that if I had walked into that house and found that
9 somebody had killed her and they were still there I'd tear
10 those people apart from limb to limb with my own hands.
11 But I think vengeance is a very personal feeling, and I
12 don't think it is something that a civilized government
13 should engage in.

14 Having said that, for 15 years, I asked for the
15 death penalty. As my most vigorous prosecutor used to
16 say, she's made me ask for it on days when I didn't think
17 we should because the law required it. And it is
18 something that -- there are other issues of government
19 that I don't agree with, but if I can make sure that the
20 law is applied correctly, that the evidence justifies it
21 under the law, I can ask for it and will continue to do
22 so.

23 (Applause.)

24 MODERATOR: In the area of drug enforcement,
25 there have been documented cases of abuses of forfeiture

1 laws. Are you pushing for any changes in that area?

2 GENERAL RENO: One of the first things I did
3 after the Deputy Attorney General Phil Heymanh came on
4 board was to ask him to immediately engage in a review of
5 the whole process to make sure that we developed
6 guidelines that would ensure a proper implementation of
7 the laws, that the forfeiture compared to the crime
8 involved, that there was clear responsibility, and that it
9 was used in the way it was intended to be used.

10 I've shared this story before, but I think asset
11 forfeiture can be an important tool. I never was able to
12 check this story out to see whether it was apocryphal or
13 not, but a friend of mine claimed to have played ball with
14 a prisoner serving 5 years in Federal prison in South Dade
15 County.

16 He was 25 years old, and as he explained to my
17 friend, he had three square meals a day, a clean room,
18 clean sheets, he could do a correspondence course for his
19 college degree, he could play baseball, he had a nice
20 prison library, and when he got out in 5 years all his
21 assets were squirreled away in a bank account and he was
22 not going to ever have to work again, and this was a nice
23 business expense as far as he was concerned.

24 I'd like to make him have some more expense.

25 (Laughter.)

1 MODERATOR: Why has it taken so long to reach a
2 decision on the future of Mr. Sessions, the Director of
3 the FBI?

4 GENERAL RENO: Because it's a very complex
5 matter.

6 (Laughter, applause.)

7 MODERATOR: Is there a timetable for dealing
8 with that?

9 (Laughter.)

10 GENERAL RENO: A timetable that will be
11 consistent with the complexity.

12 (Laughter.)

13 GENERAL RENO: It's obvious that it would not be
14 appropriate for me to comment now, but as the matter is
15 resolved, it is at that time that I think I should be
16 accountable to the people.

17 MODERATOR: Looking back at Waco, is there
18 something that you would have done differently that you
19 can discuss at this point?

20 GENERAL RENO: I am trying to keep a very, very
21 open mind, because I have, as I mentioned earlier, asked
22 and worked with the Secretary of Treasury to develop a
23 panel of 10 independent experts. Phil Heymanh mentioned
24 to me before I came over here this morning that he had
25 just met with the experts and how interested and engaged

1 they were in this effort.

2 I want them to really look me over without me
3 reaching any conclusions, any judgments. I want to be as
4 open as possible. I can assure you that there have been
5 many nights since April the 19th when I have gone to sleep
6 thinking what would I have done differently, how would I
7 have done it differently.

8 One of the tragedies is -- far less than the
9 ultimate tragedy -- is that we will never know what the
10 right answer was. But I look forward to those experts,
11 and anybody else sharing with me any thoughts that they
12 have as to how we might avoid such a tragedy in the
13 future, because I think we are going to face similar
14 problems in the future.

15 MODERATOR: How do you respond to Democratic
16 congressional criticism that this administration does not
17 have an adequate immigration policy?

18 GENERAL RENO: One of the first things that we
19 did upon taking office was to determine that immigration
20 was -- I think -- was going to be one of the most
21 important issues that we faced. I wanted to choose a
22 Commissioner of Immigration that was the best possible
23 person for the job.

24 We obviously, considering that the Attorney
25 General got started about a month and a half, almost 2

1 months after everybody else, we've been delayed in that
2 effort. But we are proceeding.

3 We have developed with the leadership of the
4 people in the Department of Justice an approach to alien
5 smuggling that I think is very effective that involves a
6 true partnership with other agencies, and we have been and
7 we will continue to work with Congress in every way
8 possible in the development of an immigration policy that
9 will begin to address a long, long period of neglect and
10 of lack of consideration of immigration as key and
11 important in all the issues that we face in the Department
12 of Justice.

13 MODERATOR: What is the Government going to do
14 about the almost half million Salvadorans that are here on
15 temporary amnesty?

16 GENERAL RENO: Again, this will be an issue that
17 we work with the Department of State, with the National
18 Security Council, in developing an appropriate approach.

19 MODERATOR: Did the White House err when it
20 called the FBI directly to investigate the travel office
21 operation?

22 GENERAL RENO: I called Mr. Nussbaum and I said
23 I don't think we should do this because it causes great
24 confusion, and I think in the future you should call me or
25 the deputy or the associate if you've got a problem.

1 (Applause.)

2 MODERATOR: Is there a criminal investigation
3 underway into the travel office operation

4 GENERAL RENO: There is currently a review
5 underway. To my knowledge there has been no -- wait, let
6 me see what the question is.

7 The FBI is continuing its investigation.

8 MODERATOR: Getting back to the family issue,
9 what can one person do to help promote your suggestion of
10 how important children between the age of 0 and 3 are, and
11 can we expect people in power in other departments of the
12 Government to share your views and to begin to make
13 changes?

14 GENERAL RENO: I asked Donna Shalala, when I met
15 her for the first time, I said I hope you don't mind me
16 fussing around in this area. She said you go right on and
17 fuss, because it is so desperately needed.

18 One of the things that has touched me most as I
19 have talked to other agencies in government, as I have
20 talked with Mayors, the Executive Committee of the
21 Conference of Mayors came to see me, Republicans and
22 Democrats were represented there. The National
23 Association of County Commissioners called on me with some
24 of their principal officers. I was amazed at all of them
25 talking about the need for early intervention and

1 prevention, all of them talking about early childhood
2 development is key to some of the critical issues that we
3 face.

4 I then spoke to the major city prosecutors arm
5 of the National District Attorney's Association, and I
6 had, I think, oftentimes been viewed as that nice lady
7 from Miami who might not be -- well -- the traditional
8 type of prosecutor. So I didn't know what reception I
9 would get. But I made the same pitch to them about the
10 need for developing a sensible approach to prison, getting
11 the bad guys put away and kept away, but then I said we
12 need to address a national agenda for children beginning
13 with 0 to 3, and the broke into applause.

14 I think all America is beginning to understand.
15 One of the leading influences on me was a remarkable
16 document called Children in Need, published by the Council
17 for Economic Development about 5 years ago, that pointed
18 out unless we make an investment in children 0 to 5 now,
19 we will not have a workforce with the skills that can
20 enable employers to fill jobs that can maintain America as
21 a first rate Nation.

22 Doctors are understanding that unless we make an
23 investment in children early on, our health care
24 institutions will be brought to their knees. More and
25 more prosecutors understand the need for making that

1 investment.

2 Chief justices from around the country, seven
3 came to see me yesterday with the same refrain about a
4 children's agenda and doing something about prevention. I
5 think America and its people understand it clearly.

6 What can we all do? I think it is important
7 that we all understand that each one of us can make a
8 difference. One of the most heartwarming things to me was
9 to see deputy marshals of the Department of Justice
10 volunteering as tutors. They asked me to go to an
11 elementary school here in the District where they were
12 tutoring. I walk in and am greeted by a young man. I ask
13 him what he wants to be when he grows up. He says, a
14 marine biologist. I said, how did you learn about marine
15 biology? He said, the Marshal brought a marine biologist
16 over and I was fascinated.

17 Each one of us can make a difference if we would
18 reach out and just, if nothing else, touch one child and
19 make a difference for that child.

20 MODERATOR: Before asking another question, I
21 would like to present you with a certificate of
22 appreciation from the National Press Club and a National
23 Press Club mug to go along with that mug in your office
24 that says, "the boss."

25 (Laughter.)

1 ATTORNEY GENERAL: No, it says, "the State
2 Attorney of the 11th Judicial Circuit."

3 MODERATOR: The boss is much shorter. You might
4 want to consider switching it.

5 The last question is, during your swearing in
6 ceremony you said that you came from Florida, 1,000 miles
7 away from Washington, as if Washington was a foreign
8 place.

9 What has surprised you the most about
10 Washington, now that you have been here 6 months?

11 GENERAL RENO: How friendly everybody has been,
12 and they were friendly before they knew I was attorney
13 general. People would talk to me on subways, people at
14 the dry cleaners, people I met as I walked into book
15 stores in that 2-1/2 weeks that I was preparing for the
16 confirmation.

17 People have been extraordinarily friendly to me
18 since I was confirmed. It has gone beyond, I think, I
19 hope, the fact that I am attorney general. They joke with
20 me, they tell funny stories, they share ideas.

21 When I went to that elementary school, to
22 Raymond Elementary, the children were wonderful, the
23 principal was wonderful. Riverside Terrace was the same
24 way. I went to the Washington Hebrew Temple to celebrate
25 the 50th anniversary of the Danish resistance effort to

1 save the Jews from the Nazi's by spiriting them away to
2 Sweden in World War II.

3 Everywhere I have turned on the Hill,
4 republicans, staff people, everywhere people have been so
5 extraordinarily supportive and friendly.

6 And I hope it doesn't have to do with my
7 popularity, because I know better than anyone else, having
8 been State attorney in Dade County for 15 years, how truly
9 fragile it is. I came into office with 71 percent of the
10 vote, and within 2 years I was being condemned bitterly as
11 having caused the MacDuffy riots. And then 10 years later
12 I was marching down the length of the Martin Luther King
13 Boulevard for the Martin Luther King parade, and Carey
14 Meek was saying, Janet, you and your mama just done stole
15 the show again.

16 (Laughter.)

17 GENERAL RENO: It is very fragile. But I think
18 the people of Washington and the people who come here to
19 serve have been very warm and very supportive, and I am
20 deeply grateful.

21 (Applause.)

22 (Whereupon, at 2:00 p.m. the conference ended.)

23

24

25