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REMARKS BY
U. S. ATTORNEY GENERAL JANET RENO
BEFORE THE
AMERICAN JEWISH CONGRESS

Monday, April 11, 1994

The Madison Hotel
Washington, D.C.

PROCEEDINGS

(1:50 p.m.)

(Standing ovation.)

GENERAL RENO: Zoe, you should not thank me, I should thank you for that wonderful confirmation team and for an absolutely splendid Deputy Attorney General, Jamie Gorelick.

You perhaps had a little bit more knowledge of Washington and what it was all about. If I had not had them, I would have been lost, and obviously Jamie is putting us on a great new course. But I would like to pay a really special tribute to you.

It is so extraordinary to suddenly have the opportunity to be the person responsible for a stand in, and to wonder what it would be like. And I have never seen anyone so gracious and so gallant.

(Applause.)

GENERAL RENO: I have just finished a 4-1/2 day trip across the United States. It will be a trip that I remember for all of my life. It started Tuesday evening in Trenton, New Jersey, with the Republican Governor of New Jersey and the two Democratic United States Senators participating with me in a town hall meeting on the crime bill and what was needed, all joining together to address this issue, all calling for a balanced, sensible approach

1 of punishment, policing and prevention in proper balance.

2 I then went to Los Angeles and walked the
3 streets of South Central Los Angeles with the Republican
4 mayor, and talked with people who live in the housing
5 development, a place that had bombarded with violence. I
6 talked with kids and I began to see a change through
7 community policing, through other initiatives.

8 It was so wonderful to stand in an elementary
9 school courtyard, an elementary school that had 40 percent
10 African American, 40 percent Hispanic, and 20 percent
11 Cambodian students and have those children look up and
12 listen. And as I would ask one or two what they wanted to
13 be when they grew up, they would turn to the community
14 police officer and say, I want to be a police officer, and
15 say it with a new spirit about policing that is truly
16 extraordinary -- trusting, believing, looking up to that
17 police officer.

18 This morning, and young man came down from
19 Boston with his two community police officers who had
20 become his mentors, and he charmed us all in the Great
21 Hall as he told the President of the United States and all
22 those assembled what community policing had done to change
23 his attitude and to get him off on the right foot.

24 And then on to Dallas, and to Oklahoma City, and
25 to Memphis, and to Nashville, and to Detroit. And I have

1 to report to you that there is a strength and a courage
2 and a spirit out there that makes me so proud, that
3 encourages me so much. Never have we had such a splendid
4 opportunity to do something sensible about crime.

5 People don't want to talk in terms of partisan
6 politics. They want common sense reasonable solutions to
7 crime. When you talk about prevention, police officers on
8 the beat understand what you're talking about. Police
9 chiefs and sheriffs know what you're talking about. And
10 they say, the Attorney General is right, we're never going
11 to do anything unless we start with prevention as well.

12 We came back to Washington today, and the
13 President came over to the Department of Justice to join
14 with law officials and others to urge Congress to pass the
15 crime bill and to do it now. And I would like to discuss
16 the bill with you in some measure.

17 Any time that you have such a major piece of
18 legislation there are going to be parts that not everybody
19 agrees with, but in its balance, in its common sense
20 approach, in the funding that goes with it, I think it
21 makes sense.

22 It focuses on the violent offenders, and as a
23 prosecutor for 15 years in Miami, I know what they're
24 talking about. Nothing -- nothing frustrates you so much
25 than to see a second or third time offender prosecuted,

1 convicted without plea bargains, sentenced to the right
2 sentence, and out in 20 to 30 percent of the sentence. If
-3 you've been a prosecutor for 15 years and you start
4 prosecuting them all over again, you understand the
5 frustration.

6 It's estimated that 10 percent of the criminals
7 commit as much as 40 percent of the crime, and the crime
8 bill provides for the direct grants to State and local
9 government to house the serious and dangerous offenders
10 for a greater sentence, preferably for the length of time
11 the courts are sentencing them, less appropriate gain
12 time.

13 It also provides for "three strikes and you're
14 out", a carefully defined three strikes according to the
15 administration proposal. There is controversy about that,
16 but listening to the President this morning as he
17 discussed the controversy and discussed the offenders we
18 were trying to focus on you understand again how important
19 that can be.

20 But one of the major questions asked is even if
21 you appropriate monies for prisons, will that be enough?
22 I think that if we use our prisons as they should be for
23 the truly dangerous offenders and keep them off the
24 streets while at the same time recognizing for other
25 offenders that it is the certainty of punishment rather

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1 than the length of punishment that is so important, we can
2 make a difference.

3 But most of the people coming into the system
4 now in State courts throughout this country are substance
5 abusing offenders, there because they have a drug problem.
6 For too long we have engaged in an aimless merry-go-round
7 of sending the person to prison, dumping them back out
8 onto the streets without treatment, without after-care,
9 without followup, and finding them doing it all over
10 again.

11 Faced with that, a number of us in Miami several
12 years ago developed the Drug Corps which operated on a
13 carrot and stick approach and said, look, you can be
14 prosecuted and punished or we will work with you in terms
15 of providing drug treatment, job training and placement,
16 random drug testing, and if you remain drug free for a
17 year we'll drop the charges and get you started on the
18 right foot. Those were for first offenders. For
19 subsequent offenders you could provide some punishment to
20 go with the treatment.

21 But you've got to have the treatment plus the
22 after-care. It does no good to put somebody into a drug
23 treatment facility and then turn them out without support
24 into the community.

25 The crime bill provides for grants for Drug

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1 Corps throughout the Nation to replicate in other areas
2 what we did in Dade County and which has now expanded to a
3 number of jurisdictions, and give people a sense that we
4 can break the cycle of drug abuse using the leverage in
5 the criminal justice system, but providing the treatment
6 and the after-care that is so necessary.

7 The community policing initiative is the
8 foundation of the crime bill. I believe so deeply in
9 community policing because basically it's old fashioned.
10 It's going to the people, it's involving the people, it's
11 getting to the neighborhood, it's getting the police
12 officer to be known by the community and vice versa.

13 The good community police officer can pick out
14 the bad guy and work with police to get him identified and
15 out of the community, meanwhile reaching out through
16 prevention programs to pull the little guys back before
17 they get into trouble.

18 We have seen it work in Dade County. I watched
19 it this past Thursday in Dallas as I walked the streets of
20 South Dallas and had shop owners and teachers and
21 principals tell me what one community police officer had
22 done within a year and a half period in terms of reducing
23 crime in the community. It can make such a significant
24 difference.

25 The community police officer can become the

1 mentor for young people in that community. They can
2 develop the trust. I heard a presentation in South Dallas
3 from a young 18-year-old, a young lady, who said I have
4 been raised to distrust police officers and to believe
5 that they are the enemy, but I'm beginning to think as I
6 read and hear and look at community policemen in action
7 that they would be our friends and our mentors, and that
8 we can make a difference.

9 It is a whole new spirit coming across this
10 Nation of police officers who are firm but community
11 friendly, police officers who are respectful and insistent
12 upon legal process, but police officers who can reach down
13 and pick up a kid and let that kid know that there is
14 somebody that cares about people.

15 The bill provides for 100,000 officers on the
16 streets of America in the next 5 years. Your question and
17 mine -- how do we pay for it -- because if there's one
18 thing I can't stand it's the Federal Government promising
19 something, authorizing it in an appropriations bill but
20 never providing the funding.

21 The Senate has defined a mechanism whereby from
22 the 252,000 positions cut to streamline the Federal
23 Government, to reduce the size of the Federal Government,
24 these monies go into a trust fund totalling \$22 billion to
25 fund all aspects of the crime bill, both punishment and

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1 prevention. It is a recognition that the problems of
2 America are on the streets of our communities, not sitting
3 behind a desk in Washington, and that we can make a
4 difference if the we get the dollars to the places where
5 they count.

6 I think, however, that the single greatest crime
7 problem in America today is youth violence. The Center
8 for Disease Control considers it one of the great public
9 health epidemics in America. The figures are startling
10 and they are surprising.

11 In 1992, the Center for Disease Control
12 determined that by that time there were 17 per 100,000
13 deaths from homicide of young white males, age 15 to 24.
14 There were 37 per 100,000 deaths for all young males in
15 that age category. There were 159 per 100,000 deaths for
16 young black males in that age category, a national
17 tragedy.

18 And more startling, in most instances the
19 perpetrator and the victim were acquainted, usually the
20 same sex and same race. Usually the incident started from
21 an argument. Usually it was not felony related. Usually
22 it was alcohol, not drugs that started it. And in 137 per
23 100,000 of those cases they involved firearms.

24 Armed with those statistics, we can see that we
25 can do so much in terms of prevention. The crime bill

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1 provides for monies for the Safe Schools Act to fund peer
2 mediation programs. Zoe was just telling me about her
3 mediation program that she is involved in that is
4 spreading across the country. These programs are working.

5 Conflict resolution programs built into the
6 curriculum of elementary through middle school are
7 working. Programs after school and in the evening for our
8 children are working.

9 Now, I think it's imperative that youngsters
10 know that if they hurt somebody, if they put a gun up
11 beside somebody's head and hurt them, they're going to
12 face a punishment. A fair punishment that's fashioned to
13 the crime and to the age of the offender.

14 The bill provides for youthful offender programs
15 that don't necessary have to follow the boot camp model.
16 They may be a wilderness institute program such as we have
17 instituted in Florida. They may be community based
18 programs that involve community service. But they provide
19 a sanction and a discipline and a structure for these kids
20 whose life is oftentimes totally without discipline and
21 structure.

22 But these programs will not work if we send the
23 kid to the wilderness institute and dump him back into the
24 community, sending him back to the apartment over the
25 open-air drug market where it started in the first place

1 without support, without follow through on any drug
2 problem he has, without job training and placement. It's
3 going to happen all over again.

4 The bill provides for after care as part of the
5 youthful offender program to give these kids to come back
6 with a chance of a strong, successful future.

7 I think clearly another of the great crime
8 problems we face in America is the problem of domestic
9 violence. 16 years ago I started to focus on it and
10 developed the domestic intervention program in Dade
11 County, I couldn't get police, authorities, or others to
12 be really concerned about it. Judges sneered at us. They
13 said, that's just a domestic, Jan.

14 I tried to persevere because I believe with all
15 my heart and soul that unless we eliminate violence in the
16 home we are never going to eliminate it in the schools and
17 on the streets.

18 (Applause.)

19 GENERAL RENO: It is estimated by the FBI that
20 there is a crime of domestic violence every 15 seconds.
21 This bill is a smart bill that will provide dollars for
22 programs in communities such as we set up in Miami, a
23 domestic violence center with experts trained in the
24 problems of domestic violence attached to and as an
25 adjunct to a domestic violence court with judges who are

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1 trained in and are sympathetic to the whole issue of
2 domestic violence.

3 We can again make a difference. This bill is
4 thoughtful and focused in what it's trying to do. In
5 terms of prevention, we provide significant dollars, more
6 dollars than have probably been provided in any other
7 initiative for solid prevention programs, the conflict
8 resolution programs, the mediation programs that I
9 described.

10 But as I travel across the country I talk to
11 youngsters who are in trouble or who have been in trouble,
12 and I ask them what could have been done to have prevented
13 the problem in the first place. Again and again they tell
14 me, something to do in the afternoons and in the evenings.
15 Something that would have kept me out of trouble in
16 elementary school would have made so much of a difference
17 I wouldn't have gotten into the gang. But I had nothing
18 to do.

19 Has it ever bothered you as much as I does me to
20 drive by a school at 4:00 or 5:00 in the afternoon and
21 then read in the paper the next morning about how some
22 community group is appearing before the city or county
23 commission to try to get them to build a youth community
24 center, when they've got a perfectly good youth community
25 center sitting right there at the elementary school.

1 (Applause.)

2 GENERAL RENO: The bill provides monies to keep
3 the schools open afternoons and in the evenings. There
4 are so many kids that aren't athletic but are great with
5 the computers. There are so many kids that can do other
6 things rather than athletics. We need to get them into
7 constructive pursuits.

8 But what the young people who have been in
9 trouble tell me is in addition to activity, they need
10 somebody to talk to, somebody who understands how
11 difficult it is to grow up in America today, somebody to
12 listen to them and not to put them down unless they
13 deserve it, not to hassle them but to treat them with
14 respect even if they are going to punish them when they
15 deserve it. The bill provides for monies for that.

16 But one of the biggest problems I have is
17 everybody says, fine, now what are you going to do?
18 You've kept them out of trouble but they can't get a job.
19 What do you expect of them next? They don't have a friend
20 who is a banker who can get them a job in the local bank,
21 or go to the local prosecutor and persuade somebody to get
22 them a job there. What is their future, particularly in
23 an economic situation that, though it is recovering, is
24 still not as rosy as it once was?

25 The bill focuses on youth in high crime areas

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1 who are at risk and provides a little over \$500 million
2 for the President's Yes Program. He is committed to
3 developing programs to give kids something to say yes to,
4 and it's for job training and job opportunity, and work
5 and job ethics that will get our youngsters prepared for a
6 future and give them a future.

7 I think the bill is balanced and thoughtful, and
8 can make a difference. But I suggest to you that there is
9 a longer range view that we have to pursue. All of this
10 will be for nought unless we begin to make an investment
11 in children -- an investment in children early on.

12 Now, another priority of the Department has been
13 civil rights enforcement. I've obviously been frustrated
14 in that it has taken me some time now to get a consistent
15 Attorney General for Civil Rights confirmed, but sometimes
16 it's worth waiting for.

17 Deval Patrick is a splendid young man, a Boston
18 lawyer who grew up in a housing development in Chicago,
19 raised by his mother and his grandmother, an extraordinary
20 young man who has been active in the NAACP legal defense
21 fund, who has donated many, many hours in his private
22 practice to pro bono effort, who represents a vigorous
23 advocate, a fair and thoughtful one, and a very wonderful
24 human being.

25 One of my favorite stories of Deval's is as I

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1 went to his announcement, the announcement by the
2 President, he had his two little girls with him. His wife
3 had brought them down on the train. The little 5-year-
4 old was leaning back over the seat and gabbing at the
5 people behind her on the train. And they said, where are
6 you going, little girl? And she said, I'm going to
7 Washington. What are going to do there, little girl? I'm
8 going to see the President. Oh, isn't she cute.

9 (Laughter.)

10 GENERAL RENO: The President was very taken with
11 her.

12 (Laughter.)

13 GENERAL RENO: But I am so proud of the career
14 lawyers in the Department because even in this interim
15 they have continued to do everything that they can to see
16 that the laws are enforced, and I think Deval's coming on
17 board will enhance this effort and will invigorate it.

18 But in this interim we have focused on lending
19 discrimination, trying to set a standard and trying to let
20 the lending industry know what to expect in terms of our
21 enforcement activities, trying to educate them, trying to
22 work with them but letting them know by action as well as
23 word that if we can ferret out lending discrimination, if
24 there is not conduct that will product compliance we're
25 going to vigorously enforce it by every action at our

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1 disposal.

2 In terms of fair housing enforcement, we're
3 trying to do the same, and the Voting Rights Act and the
4 Americans With Disabilities Act. We're trying to focus on
5 setting a standard and letting people know what to expect,
6 and that we will not tolerate any type of discrimination,
7 but working with people to educate them and let them
8 understand up front.

9 And it's amazing. If you show people what the
10 law says, if you talk with them, if you persuade them you
11 can go a long way, particularly if they know you're ready
12 to come behind with whatever appropriate legal action is
13 required.

14 But all the civil rights enforcement in the
15 world won't make any difference unless we raise our
16 children to enjoy the privileges that strong civil rights
17 enforcement can bring. What good is it to provide equal
18 education for a high school student if he's shot down on
19 the streets at 13? And what good is equal education if
20 the child never gets the foundation for an education that
21 can mean anything?

22 Another concern I have in the Department,
23 amongst many but it ties into this general principle that
24 I weave here, is the whole area of access to our civil
25 justice system. I practiced law in a small firm. That's

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1 where I met my dear friend, Ann Lewis, a long time ago.

2 And it used to frustrate me to no end to have to
3 charge somebody a fee, particularly when I knew they
4 couldn't afford it. I don't think I would have ever made
5 very much money if I didn't practice then, and I hope
6 someday to save up enough money to have that type of
7 practice.

8 (Laughter.)

9 GENERAL RENO: But the more I have had the
10 opportunity in these 15 years that I have been the
11 prosecutor to see people who have no access to legal
12 services, no access to the courts because there are no pro
13 bono services available, there are no legal services
14 programs available, and because the system itself is so
15 complicated that people have to have lawyers to do much,
16 it is one of the highest priorities of whatever I can do
17 in the Department of Justice to address the issues
18 involved, and the cost and delay now presently involved in
19 our civil justice system, but to more importantly address
20 the issue of access.

21 When the American Bar Association itself
22 estimates that 70 to 80 percent of the poor, the working
23 poor in the United States have no access to a lawyer, much
24 less to the courts, then you know that for too many
25 Americans the law is worth little more than the paper it

1 is written on. And if we are going to talk in terms of
2 civil rights, if we're going to talk in terms of the law
3 we have got to make the law real for all American people.

4 We can increase our pro bono efforts. We can do
5 so much in that direction. We can increase funding for
6 legal services. But I think we also have to look at the
7 structure of the law. It always frustrates me to see that
8 you sometimes have to have a lawyer to go deal with your
9 government on something that you're entitled to. If it
10 was simple enough for you to understand what you were
11 entitle to --

12 (Applause.)

13 GENERAL RENO: Lawyers have always been able to
14 say something more complicated in a more complicated way
15 than anybody else that I've ever known. But I have been
16 in this office for over a year, and I still don't
17 understand all the Roman numerals, all the alphabets, all
18 the labels and all the acts.

19 I have a new goal which is to get us lawyers in
20 Government to speak in small, old words that people can
21 understand.

22 (Applause.)

23 GENERAL RENO: I think it's important for us to
24 talk in terms of new types of advocacy. I used to look at
25 some of these community activists that understood the in's

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1 and out's of some of the poverty law better than all of us
2 who had gone to law school. And I suddenly got the idea
3 -- why don't we have a 4-year degree in community advocacy
4 that teaches the issues involved in poverty law better
5 than you'll ever learn in 3 years at Harvard Law School,
6 and you can provide the services to your clients at a lot
7 less cost while still making \$35,000 or \$40,000 a year,
8 and probably more than you're making now.

9 At any rate, we've got to be bold and innovative
10 as we address the issue of how we make the law real for
11 all Americans.

12 There is a statement on the east side of the
13 Justice building on 9th Avenue that says, "the common law
14 is derived from the will of mankind, issuing from the
15 people, framed by mutual confidence, and sanctioned by the
16 light of reason." For too many Americans the law does
17 exist. It does not issue from them. And we have got to
18 reweave the fabric of society around them and the fabric
19 of the law around them so it will issue from all people.

20 But none of that will be possible unless we make
21 an investment in children. Whether it be crime or the
22 ending of discrimination, we've got to first focus on our
23 children. That became clear to me as a prosecutor when I
24 first focused on juvenile delinquents and said that I
25 wanted to build the best delinquency system that we could,

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1 and discovered that if you wait until a child is 16 or 17,
2 that's too late. Or if it's not too late, we'll never
3 have enough dollars to change all the kids after we've
4 waited that long.

5 So, we started focusing on causal connections
6 with delinquency and found a correlation between dropouts
7 and delinquency. And we looked at dropout prevention
8 programs in the middle school. That's too late. Already
9 the child has fallen two grade levels behind and is
10 beginning to act out for other reasons or in other
11 fashions to secure attention to themselves.

12 And so we focused on an early neighborhood
13 intervention program. But at that point, the crack
14 epidemic hit Miami in 1985, and the doctors took me to our
15 large public hospital, and I started trying to figure out
16 what to do about crack involved mothers and their infants.
17 That's where it starts, and that's what the doctors
18 started teaching me.

19 They started teaching me that zero to 3 was the
20 most formative time in a person's life. And I suddenly
21 realized why so many of our efforts over the last 25 years
22 have failed.

23 How many juvenile court judges do you know that
24 are just saints and angels, and try their level best, and
25 get frustrated and upset and keep trying, but they never

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1 seem to succeed? And that fifth grade teacher that tries
2 her level best and is a marvelous educator and a
3 tremendous support for the kids. She tries her best and
4 then a kid goes wrong.

5 And then you see so many areas along the way
6 where we don't provide the foundation. There will be one
7 program that works and then we let it go. We've got to
8 develop a continuum that recognizes that life is a life of
9 a whole, not just the juvenile justice system, not just
10 the child welfare system, not just the education system,
11 not just pediatrics, it's a whole continuum with parenting
12 being the base of it all.

13 And we have got to work together to make sure
14 that we focus on what we can do to make sure that parents
15 are old enough, wise enough, and financially able enough
16 to take care of their children.

17 We've got to teach our parents how to be better
18 parents. In this dislocated society there are too many
19 children raised without the benefit of knowing how to be
20 parents from the people who have failed to supervise them.

21 We've got to ensure the enhancement of family
22 preservation programs that are already underway in this
23 administration, and the Family Leave Act will give our
24 parents more time to be with their children.

25 We've got to get health care reform passed. We

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1 can debate it, we can discuss it, but there is something
2 that is imperative. If we have a Nation that will give to
3 70-year-old people an operation that will extend their
4 life expectancy by 3 years, but then we turn to the family
5 of working poor and say, sorry, your child can't have
6 preventive medical care because you make too much money to
7 be eligible for Medicaid, but you don't have health
8 insurance. We have got to make sure that all of our
9 children and their families have preventative medical
10 care.

11 We've got to make sure that all of our children
12 have save, constructive educare in those first 3 years
13 that are so formative, and that there are programs after
14 school and in the evening for them. And that we address
15 the world they live in in terms of television violence.

16 I don't want to see Government regulate TV, but
17 the correlation between TV violence and violence amongst
18 children has been documented far too often to turn away
19 from it and ignore it. We have, by the power of
20 persuasion, got to do more in terms of making sure that
21 television understands what an extraordinary medium it is
22 for the education of children, for the positive growth of
23 children.

24 But I think the greatest single challenge that
25 we face in America today is not in Government but in our

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1 homes and in our work places. How do we put family and
2 children first again? I remember my afternoons after
3 school and in the evening. My mother worked in the home.
4 My father worked downtown. My mother taught us to play
5 baseball and to appreciate Beethoven's symphonies. She
6 taught us her favorite poems and to bake a cake. She
7 punished us and she loved us with all her heart. And
8 there is no child care in the world that will ever be a
9 substitute for what that lady was in our lives.

10 And yet I look at the young men and women in
11 America now struggling to get breakfast on the table, the
12 children off to school, go down an try a case, finish at
13 6:30, talk to witnesses until 7:30, get home, get dinner
14 on the table, the children bathed, homework done, Saturday
15 to temple, Sunday to church or vice versa. On Sunday
16 night, start preparing for trial again and not quality
17 time with their children.

18 Ladies and gentlemen, if we can send a man to
19 the moon we can surely, with modern technology as we have
20 it, be an even more productive Nation in terms of our
21 business output, in terms of our manufacturing output,
22 while at the same time using our technology to enable us
23 to spend a lot more time with our children and a lot more
24 time with our families.

25 (Applause.)

1 GENERAL RENO: We have a splendid opportunity
2 now at a time with an administration that is addressing
3 that continuum, addressing the problems of crime,
4 addressing the problems of civil rights. But all of us
5 have got to remember our most precious possession, our
6 families.

7 (Standing ovation.)

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