

1 REMARKS OF THE HON. JANET RENO
2 ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES
3 TO THE
4 FIFTH ANNUAL SALUTE TO LAW ENFORCEMENT
5 OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA CHAPTER,
6 FEDERAL BAR ASSOCIATION

7
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9
10 Tuesday, May 17, 1994

11
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13
14
15 Officers Club
16 Bolling Air Force Base
17 Washington, D.C.

PROCEEDINGS

(8:39 p.m.)

1
2
3 GENERAL RENO: Thank you very much. It is a
4 great honor for me to be here today and to recognize those
5 who have given their lives. I think it is important for
6 us to remember them not just one week of the year, but
7 every day of the year.

8 I think it is not just right that we remember
9 them now, but that we remember them 5 and 10 and 15 years
10 from now, and that we let their children know how special
11 they were to their community and the people they served.

12 For as long as I live, I will always remember a
13 young woman who I met last when she was approximately 13.
14 I had first seen here as a 3-year-old baby coming to court
15 with her mother to observe the trial of the man who had
16 shot and killed her police officer father shortly after I
17 took office as prosecutor in Dade County in 1978.

18 We prosecuted convicted him, he was sentenced to
19 death, and the court reversed, saying we took him to trial
20 too fast. We prosecuted, convicted, and he was sentenced
21 to death again. This time it was reversed because of the
22 change in death penalty law.

23 The case was now back for the third time, and
24 the process was repeated. As I walked back to visit the
25 widow, who I had not seen in some time, there was his

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1 daughter standing there.

2 Police officers who had served with her father,
3 friends, prosecutors who had known him made clear that
4 that young lady knew how special he was, how much he had
5 served his community, how brave he had been, how much he
6 had enjoyed policing, and how much he had done to reach
7 out to prevent crime as well as to take action against
8 those who broke the law.

9 This was a young lady who stood there with pride
10 and dignity, and you realized how important it was that we
11 never, ever let those that give their lives in the line of
12 law enforcement be forgotten.

13 I think it is important that we remember each
14 day what it is like to be a police officer, what it is
15 like to be a Federal agent, what it is like to get up in
16 the morning.

17 Those of you who are lawyers here, imagine just
18 getting up at about 5:30 in the morning to go to the 7:00
19 shift. You do not know what the day will bring. It may
20 bring monotony of one small matter after another. It may
21 bring a lot of report writing. You may have to go to
22 court and wait for 4 hours, only to be told the case had
23 pled out and you can go back.

24 You will feel frustrated because you cared about
25 your streets, and you wondered what was happening while

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1 you sat in court fiddling your time away, fussing at the
2 lawyers, wondering what the judge was doing, and not
3 understanding the process that sometimes seems so
4 mysterious because you could be involved in it.

5 But that same officer may also face a day where
6 he is responding to a domestic, a seemingly innocuous
7 crime but probably one of the most dangerous crimes of
8 all, and he may face bullets as he walks in that door.

9 Or the officer who responds to a traffic
10 accident and faces a dispute, or the officer who is gunned
11 down in cold blood by a 14-year-old who has been raised in
12 hell and who has never learned how to comply with the law
13 or to meet ethical and moral standards that we hold dear.

14 And yet think of what that officer has to do on
15 the street. She or he may be standing in a crowded
16 alleyway, with a crowd gathering. Because of limited
17 resources there may not be a backup for that officer yet.

18 There are search and seizure issues that she or
19 he has to face. And they make those decisions day in and
20 day out, never having gone to law school in many
21 instances, never being able to sit at their desk and prop
22 their feet up and pull the law book off the shelf and
23 research the issue in a careful and thoughtful way. But
24 having to make the very same search and seizure decisions,
25 the very same constitutional decisions that lawyers are

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1 required to make, only they have to make it like this.
2 They have to make it under the most difficult of
3 circumstances. They have to make it while they put their
4 life on the line.

5 I remember standing in an alleyway with an
6 officer under just those circumstances. He was a
7 magician. By tone of voice and by manner he dispelled
8 that crowd and got everybody relaxed. He applied
9 emergency first aid before the emergency folks got there.
10 He made the legal decisions. He made the arrest. He took
11 the person into custody, and off we went down to the jail.

12 And nobody got upset with anybody. Nobody got
13 hurt. And that man to me was one of the greatest men that
14 I have ever watched in action based on his performance
15 that night.

16 We owe police officers so very much. And police
17 officers are at the cutting edge of something exciting
18 happening in this Nation.

19 Today I was at a panel before the Senate Labor
20 and Human Resources Committee as they considered
21 prevention programs. Five young people, the youngest one
22 being about 9-years-old came to about here on me, and the
23 oldest one about 17, who talked about the need for
24 mandatory antiviolence programs in the school.

25 They represented a range of interests. A 14-

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1 year-old girl said that they did not need more police,
2 that police were just arresting the wrong people and
3 creating suspicion. The little 9-year-old said, I want
4 more police so that they can come get those gang members
5 that bother me and that they can come help and that they
6 can come support me because I like the police.

7 I walked into an elementary school in South
8 Central Los Angeles, 40 percent African-American, 20
9 percent Cambodian, and 40 percent Hispanic. I asked these
10 youngsters what they wanted to be when they grew up. And
11 they turned and looked over my shoulder and pointed at the
12 community police officer and said, I want to be a
13 policeman.

14 A young lady in South Dallas, as I walked with
15 the community police officer, explained that she had
16 always thought that police officers were her enemy, but
17 because of community policing she was now beginning to
18 think that they were her friends and her allies.

19 And I stood in the great hall of the Department
20 of Justice as community police officers from Albany,
21 Georgia and Dorchester, Massachusetts came to tell the
22 President of the United States how important it was to put
23 community police officers on the streets.

24 And with the police officers from Dorchester
25 came three young men who had decided they were going to

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1 come down and tell the President of the United States what
2 these two police officers had done to keep them out of
3 trouble when they were about to get into trouble with
4 gangs and the like in Dorchester.

5 And you realize what is happening when you come
6 to an elementary school in Anacostia, Riverside Terrace,
7 River Terrace Elementary. You walk in. You are greeted
8 by a young man in the sixth grade. He's standing there,
9 alert. He introduces himself to you as your host for the
10 day. And you ask him what he wants to be when he grows
11 up.

12 He looks up at the United States Marshal that
13 has brought you, the United States Marshal who is
14 responsible for a mentoring program by the Marshals
15 Service in that school, and says I want to be a marine
16 biologist.

17 And I said, how do you know about marine
18 biology, looking out at the Anacostia and not thinking
19 that was a place to learn. And he turned to me and he
20 looked up at this tall, lanky marshall standing next to me
21 and he said, the marshall brought a marine biologist to
22 the school and he talked to us, and I got fascinated with
23 marine biology.

24 Each of us can make a difference, but law
25 enforcement is at the cutting edge of bringing young

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1 people together, of bringing the community together.
2 School teachers, social workers, everyone is coming
3 together around a man or a woman they trust, a man or a
4 woman who is a hero to them, a man or a woman who is
5 willing to give up their life for them, who I have seen
6 take them fishing, who I have seen give them a pat of the
7 back when they deserve it and a figurative swift kick when
8 they deserved that as well. And they are fair, and the
9 young people understand it.

10 Policing is on a new frontier in America today
11 because of the dedicated people who have committed their
12 life to law enforcement, whether it be the FBI agents who
13 work with a group from an elementary school here in the
14 District who came to sing the day before yesterday at the
15 remarkable service.

16 Wherever it is, no matter who it is, Federal,
17 State or local, police officers are beginning to be the
18 instrument which heals our communities. And it is right
19 and proper because they represent what this Nation is all
20 about.

21 They represent the authority, the law, the
22 majesty of the law of this Nation, and they are doing it
23 in the right way, focusing on the bad guy and going after
24 him and trying to extricate him and put him in the jail,
25 while at the same time to bring the community together.

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1 We must do much more than give them pats on the
2 back. We must give our law enforcement officials both at
3 the Federal and State levels the tools they need to do the
4 job. We must never let police officers go out without
5 backups when it's appropriate. We must not let them go
6 out and face those with higher fire power.

7 The American people are beginning to speak out,
8 and their words are being heard. With 1992 figures that
9 showed that crimes committed with hand guns had escalated
10 in America, they have now sent a clear message that is
11 being heard by Congress that we want to Brady Bill to
12 become the Brady law.

13 It has, and already we are detecting people with
14 prior records attempting to purchase a weapon who don't
15 belong to have a weapon and who don't get the weapon.

16 The historic vote on the ban on assault weapons
17 is a further expression of the American people's will to
18 say, look, we want to give some relief to our police
19 officers so that they can begin to be about their work on
20 the streets without looking at these military style
21 weapons.

22 But we must give them more. There is a crime
23 bill now pending, about ready to go into conference. This
24 Nation cannot stand by and see that crime bill get caught
25 up in political rhetoric. It is not a Republican or a

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1 Democratic issue. It is an issue of common sense, that we
2 need enough prison cells through direct grants to State
3 and local government to ensure that dangerous offenders,
4 career criminals, are put away and kept away for the
5 length of time the judges are sentencing them.

6 There is nothing more frustrating to a local law
7 enforcement official than to see somebody prosecuted,
8 convicted, sentenced, sentenced to the right sentence, and
9 then find them out in 20 to 30 percent of the sentence
10 because we don't have enough prison cells.

11 Federal law enforcement agents haven't had to
12 face that. I came to Washington thinking, oh, my
13 goodness, I've got plenty of prison cells to deal with
14 with the Bureau of Prison. And I find overcrowding levels
15 at the same level or worse than most State institutions.
16 It's a better run agency, and so they have been able to
17 cope with the problem of overcrowding, but Federal law
18 enforcement is going to face the same issue.

19 And I am dedicated to doing everything I can to
20 make sure that when an FBI agent or an ATF agent makes an
21 arrest, when Eric Holder's prosecutors prosecute and the
22 judge sentences the right way, we're going to know there's
23 going to be truth in sentencing for that Federal offender.

24 We've got to do the same by seeing that a crime
25 bill is passed that will provide direct support to local

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1 government where people are on the front line in the fight
2 against violence.

3 The crime bill provides monies for 100,000
4 community police officers on the streets of America. I
5 have met with community agency after police agency,
6 talking to them to make sure that the bill is fashioned in
7 a way that will be truly supportive of local law
8 enforcement, and I think we have a good product.

9 The bill also provides monies for prevention,
10 because it is law enforcement that tells me, more so than
11 the social worker or anybody else, look, we're not going
12 to win the battle if we wait to deal with it ourselves.
13 We've got to start earlier.

14 This is an exciting time in this Nation's
15 history. The American people are speaking out. There is
16 something interesting happening.

17 6 years ago, and my friends tell me the same was
18 true around the Nation, you could never get anybody to
19 come to a town meeting. Nobody would bother to come and
20 really be heard.

21 Now, wherever I go people come out to ask
22 questions, to make their views known. They want to be
23 heard. And the only thing that gets them upset and unruly
24 is if you say, sorry, you can't be heard. We've got to
25 hear from these bigwigs. They want to be heard, and they

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1 have such extraordinary ideas.

2 This afternoon at about 5:00 three students came
3 to see me because I had met them at a community program in
4 Baltimore. I didn't have time to visit with them because
5 I had to be back in Washington. They were upset. I
6 invited them to come to see me.

7 It was one of the best half hours I've had in a
8 long time in terms of what young people can do better,
9 what police can do better, and what attorneys general can
10 do better. People are speaking out and caring.

11 I have had the most extraordinary opportunity
12 that any lawyer could have to serve the people of the
13 United States. People have asked what this first year in
14 office has been like. It has been an opportunity that no
15 one could ever dream of.

16 To those of you in law enforcement, I have to
17 tell you that as much as I think that law enforcement has
18 probably the hardest job, I still love lawyers and I love
19 the law. But what I can't stand are indifferent and
20 greedy lawyers.

21 I see lawyers now trying to make the law an
22 instrument for what is right, trying to work with law
23 enforcement, as you do tonight, and support law
24 enforcement.

25 I see people coming together at town meetings.

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1 I see a spirit in America today that gives me more hope,
2 more encouragement, and more faith in the future than I
3 have had for a very long time.

4 It is an honor and a privilege to be with you
5 tonight as you honor the people who gave their lives to
6 make this spirit, this tradition carry on.

7 (Applause.)

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