

FEDERAL LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS ASSOCIATION DINNER

**Airport Hilton Hotel
Newark, New Jersey
May 5, 1995**

REMARKS OF ATTORNEY GENERAL JANET RENO

**Howard A. Rappaport, C.S.R., Official Court Reporter
United States District Court
District of New Jersey**

1 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Thank you so very
2 much for inviting me to share this evening with you.

3 It is a very special evening, for tonight
4 we remember the Federal Law Enforcement Officers who
5 gave their lives at Waco. We recognize others here
6 tonight for acts of valor. We honor all of you in law
7 enforcement who serve your nation with dedication,
8 with courage and with great devotion.

9 A patriot is defined as "a person who
10 loves his or her country and guards its welfare." You
11 are the true patriots. You are the patriots who are
12 out there every day putting your life on the line for
13 us. You speak in moderate, responsible tones. You
14 are professionals. You love and respect the law, and
15 when you make mistakes -- as is inevitable in any
16 job -- you try to make things right and get up the
17 next day vowing to do better.

18 You are the face of law enforcement. The
19 four brave agents who perished doing their duty,
20 Stephen Willis, Robert Williams, Conway LeBleu and
21 Todd McKeenan. Daniel McFadden of the Park Police,
22 who is being honored tonight for rescuing three aliens
23 in the swirling waters of the Atlantic. Chris Bauer
24 and Michael Brenner, of the Customs Service, who
25 rescued crew members of a fishing ship sinking off

1 Cape Cod. Rebecca Perkins, of the General Services
2 Administration, whose quick actions were instrumental
3 in saving a fellow federal officer is also recognized
4 tonight. Each of you exemplify the goodness, the
5 courage, the humanity and the valor of those who
6 devote their lives to public service.

7 Americans of decency and good will know
8 who you are and support you. Make no mistake about
9 that. The harsh words of the few who wish to
10 substitute their will for the rule of law you protect
11 do not speak for the American people. You are one of
12 the reasons America is the most wonderful nation in
13 the world. You work to bring order and safety to
14 American life. You are part of a government that has
15 given its people more freedom and greater opportunity
16 than any other government in the history of the world.

17 In these last days, we have seen a
18 terrible violence in this land we love. But, we have
19 also seen Americans from all over the country come
20 together to reject the violence and hatred that
-21 spawned that terrible tragedy. We have seen Americans
22 come together with the citizens of Oklahoma City to
23 hold the victims and their loved ones and help them to
24 begin to heal; to track down these evil cowards who
25 committed this unspeakable act; to honor the rule of

1 law; and to defend this nation and the freedoms we
2 hold dear.

3 But some few Americans have linked the
4 tragedy of Oklahoma City to what happened at Waco.
5 You will recall that the Justice Department did a
6 detailed chronology of events at Waco that involved
7 interviews with more than 950 people and totaled more
8 than 500 pages. A separate evaluation was done by the
9 highly respected Edward Dennis, a former U.S. Attorney
10 and head of the Justice Department's Criminal Division
11 in the Reagan and Bush administrations. On top of
12 that, ten experts representing various disciplines
13 prepared reports which suggested ways to improve the
14 handling of such situations in the future. Any
15 assertion that the Waco incident was not thoroughly
16 investigated and reviewed is woefully incorrect.

17 Why would other people be eager to ignore
18 the true facts about Waco and, instead, attempt to
19 rewrite the record, to take a tragedy none of us
20 wanted and twist it to their own ends? Or worse, how
21 could some people imply a moral equivalency between
22 the government's efforts to save lives at Waco and the
23 cruel and indifferent taking of lives in Oklahoma
24 City? Such reckless comparisons are despicable and
25 have no basis in the truth.

1 (Applause.)

2 It's useful to remember the facts.

3 First, federal agents did not go to the branch
4 Davidian compound on February 28, 1993 to seize
5 weapons which are legal to possess. They went because
6 a United States magistrate issued an arrest warrant
7 for David Koresh and a search warrant to seize illegal
8 weapons, such as hand grenades and grenade launchers
9 and fully automatic machine guns. The subsequent
10 search of the compound revealed that Koresh had
11 stockpiled 32 illegal machine guns and nearly 400,000
12 rounds of ammunition.

13 One fact is indisputable: Federal agents
14 entered the compound lawfully to perform a lawful
15 mission authorized by an independent magistrate who
16 had found sufficient probable cause that Koresh and
17 his lieutenants had violated the law. If we are going
18 to have a civilization, and give the law any meaning
19 in our lives, we cannot respond to the arrival of
20 police on our doorsteps by opening fire on them.

-21 Four ATF agents were killed. Sixteen
22 were wounded. Sons and husbands and fathers -- who
23 committed no act of evil, no act of arrogance. They
24 were doing their duty. No government can walk away
25 from the deliberate shooting of its own police

1 officers, and we did not.

2 (Applause.)

3 We did exhibit great patience in trying
4 to reach a peaceful resolution. No direct effort to
5 dislodge the inhabitants of the compound was taken for
6 51 days, many times longer than the longest, previous
7 barricade situation involving the FBI which lasted
8 only four days. Everyone understood that the primary
9 objective was to achieve an end to the standoff that
10 would bring those responsible to account for their
11 actions in a court of law, while preserving the safety
12 of the women and children inside the compound.

13 Day after day, we met at the Justice
14 Department and at the FBI to review the situation. We
15 studied intelligence reports, evaluations of experts,
16 and the statements of individuals who had been in the
17 compound. We met personally with outside experts to
18 get their advice.

19 By the middle of April, we reached
20 consensus on one crucial point: That the risk of
21 doing nothing had come to exceed the risk of doing
22 something. A dangerous situation was becoming more
23 dangerous to all concerned.

24 There were several reasons for reaching
25 that conclusion. First and foremost, the law

1 enforcement agents on the ground concluded that the
2 perimeter had become unstable and posed a risk both to
3 them and to the surrounding homes and farms.

4 Individuals sympathetic to Koresh, were threatening to
5 take matters into their own hands to end the
6 stalemate, were at various times reportedly on the
7 way. The hostage rescue team, the first line of
8 defense, had reached a point where it would have to be
9 pulled back for rest and retraining.

10 Secondly, FBI experts who were evaluating
11 Koresh's behavior had come to fear that he would seek
12 to provoke some cataclysmic end -- at a time, and
13 using a method, of his own choosing. Using the
14 element of surprise, he might try to kill the most
15 people at a time when we were least prepared to
16 respond or to minimize the loss of life.

17 Thirdly, conditions inside the compound
18 had deteriorated. Human waste was being thrown into
19 the open courtyard, and the outbreak of disease was a
20 distinct possibility we considered in light of the
21 children. Those who had come out of the compound
22 reported that Koresh had sexual relations with girls
23 as young as 10 or 11.

24 In light of all of these things, a plan
25 was agreed to, to use an irritant gas incrementally,

1 starting at one end of the compound, to shrink the
2 usable space to induce Koresh to start letting some of
3 his people go. The response was heavy gunfire from
4 the tower and other parts of the compound, which was
5 responded to by placing the non-lethal gas in those
6 additional areas. The rest, you know.

7 The evidence clearly shows that David
8 Koresh decided to take the lives of everyone around
9 him. The setting of the fire by the individuals
10 inside the compound is beyond question. They were
11 observed setting the fire. Their words were recorded
12 while they were spreading the fuels used to ignite the
13 fire. Twenty two individuals were shot to death by
14 those in the compound, some by their own hand, some by
15 other branch Davidians. A baby was stabbed to death.
16 Although hundreds of bullets were fired at FBI agents,
17 not a single shot was fired in return. FBI agents
18 risked their own lives to try to save some of the
19 branch Davidians from inside the burdening building.

20 There is much to be angry about when we
21 talk about Waco -- and the government's conduct is not
22 the reason. David Koresh is the reason. He set a
23 standard no civilized society can tolerate. No
24 individual can defy the law by accumulating illegal
25 weapons of war that threaten his neighbors. No one

1 has the right to shoot at anybody and then claim to be
2 above the law. No one has the right to have regular
3 sexual relations with children as young as 10 and 11,
4 as Koresh did, according to branch Davidians who
5 survived, and then claim, as some have, that he wasn't
6 molesting children. The one parallel with Oklahoma
7 City is the heart breaking number of children who were
8 victimized as the result of human madness.

9 The events at Waco were put to the test
10 in the traditional American way: A judge and jury
11 heard the cases of branch Davidians who survived the
12 fire. Eight of them were convicted for crimes
13 including aiding and abetting manslaughter and
14 firearms and explosives violations.

15 Meanwhile, it is unfair, it is
16 unreasonable, it is a lie, to spread the poison that
17 the government was responsible at Waco for the murder
18 of innocents. That kind of language is unacceptable
19 in a society that values truth.

20 I want you to know you have my gratitude,
21 and the gratitude of the President, for the work you
22 do. Both the day to day burdens of your work, and the
23 heroism you demonstrate so frequently without any
24 notice to anybody else.

25 I want the families to know that you have

1 our gratitude for the support, for the encouragement,
2 for the understanding you give to your loved ones who
3 serve us all.

4 Law enforcement is one of the most
5 difficult jobs in America. Agents, police officers
6 and deputy sheriffs go to work each day to protect
7 their fellow Americans from violence and crime. They
8 protect our rights and help insure our freedoms. They
9 make difficult decisions on the law and evidence in
10 sometimes the most dangerous situations. They help
11 the young, the old, the frail, the helpless. You are
12 our heroes.

13 Thank you for letting me speak from the
14 heart to you tonight.

15 (Applause.)

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