

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

REMARKS OF  
ATTORNEY GENERAL JANET RENO

AT A  
BANQUET OF FEDERAL LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICIALS

Thursday; July 13, 1995

8:28 p.m.

Hyatt Regency Hotel  
Reston, Virginia

## P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. BIONDI: I'd like to thank our guests again for sharing their presence and their time with us this evening. I'd like to also very much welcome Attorney General Reno. I can't express enough to you how grateful we are that you've all joined us tonight. We believe your attendance at our banquet is a true test of the renewed dedication to joint cooperation between federal law enforcement agencies.

I'd now like to introduce to you the host of our banquet, a man I am very proud to work for. Since becoming Commissioner of the Customs Service, George Weise has worked diligently to change the way we do business. Mr. Weise, along with our Deputy Commissioner, Michael Lane, has taken on the seemingly overwhelming task of reorganizing the Customs Service to put our officers where they need to be to fight crime. We're grateful for his support and we're honored to have him here to host this evening's event.

It's a great honor and a privilege for me

to introduce to you the Commissioner of the United States Customs Service, the Honorable George Weise.

[Applause.]

COMMISSIONER WEISE: Thank you very much, Walt, and congratulations to you and to all of the people in the audience for just an outstanding conference this week. You're just about finished. You've got one day left, and I think it has been an extremely productive, as well as a professional conference. I also want to join with Walt in thanking all of the people up here on the dais with us, and I think it is a wonderful testament to what's going on in Washington of having federal law enforcement organizations work closely together.

I have the great honor of introducing our guest speaker, and by way of introducing our very special guest, I would like to first say a few words about what I see as the challenges we face. I'm not speaking just about the challenges facing the Customs Service, but about those faced by all the men and women who enforce our nation's laws.

We live in a society that is becoming

increasingly violent. Violence in films and on television has attracted a good deal of attention lately, but the sad fact is that usually the most violent program on any given day is the local evening news.

I'm not a sociologist. I can't tell you why our country is becoming more violent. I can't explain why some Americans have lost all sense of shame, self-discipline, and respect for others. I just know that law enforcement people, all of you represented in this room, are the only true protection for law-abiding citizens from those who would cause harm and destruction.

Upholding the law is no simple task these days. Money for all public services, including law enforcement, is scarce. We're continually being asked to do more with less. Law enforcement is always an uphill task. Lately, we've found that the hill is getting steeper and steeper.

This week's headlines clearly indicate what federal law enforcement is up against. It is no accident that Waco, the repeated attacks on ATF,

and the resurrection of the FBI incident in Idaho are all stories in the news. We have become a political target. Someone has decided that it's good politics to skewer federal law enforcement and they've hung a bull's eye on our backs.

I don't mean to suggest that we in the federal law enforcement community are perfect and that we don't make mistakes and should never be criticized. We do make mistakes, sometimes some big ones, and when we do, strong corrective action must be taken.

But it seems obvious to me from the tone and decibel level of the attacks on law enforcement that the well-being of our respective agencies is probably the last thing on the minds of the critics. It's obvious because among those attacking law enforcement, there seems to be absolutely no interest in what could be called constructive criticism, no interest in offering solutions to problems. The only goal is to make federal law enforcement look bad in the headlines, on the evening news, as often and in as many places

as possible.

It's hard for me to believe that this is happening in the wake of the that terrible Oklahoma City tragedy which impacted this organization and so many others. It's hard to believe some people are still trying their best to make law enforcement out as the people wearing the black hats, but that is exactly what is going on.

Under these circumstances, it is absolutely critical that we all continue to pull together. If we do not, then we will make ourselves even more vulnerable. Even more important, we will find that meeting the public's very real and very understandable demand to control crime will become increasingly difficult, and this is our fundamental responsibility.

No matter how good or bad the headlines may get, we've got to stay focused on our law enforcement obligations, especially given the challenges of today's world, and we can do this best if we act in unison. If you look at this dais, you will see a very visible symbol of that

unity, and once again I thank my good friend, Tom Constantine, from DEA and all the representatives from FBI, ATF, Secret Service, and all the others who are represented up here, especially the Attorney General, whom I'll now be introducing.

Just recently, we had a very good example of what cooperation can mean. Operation Cornerstone was a vivid illustration of what we can do when we act as a team. Customs, DEA, and the U.S. Attorney's office combined to deliver a major blow to the Cali cartel. Cornerstone was a sweet victory, but we all know that it was just one battle. There will be others, and in order to win them, we've got to show the same cohesion displayed in Operation Cornerstone.

Our guest speaker tonight spent most of her professional career in a part of the country in a position where she witnessed close up the tragic consequences of drug trafficking. As State Attorney for Dade County, Florida, for 15 years prior to her appointment as our country's top law enforcement officer, Janet Reno quickly developed a

reputation for integrity, fairness, and unyielding professionalism.

As Attorney General, she has enhanced that reputation even further. She sets an example for leadership and accepting responsibility that Harry Truman would have been proud of. She makes no bones about where she stands on issues. At the same time, she makes it clear that her foremost duty is to uphold the laws of the United States.

From the very start of her tenure, Janet Reno has devoted great attention to ensuring that federal law enforcement efforts move in tandem. She has delivered this message of interagency harmony over and over again. More important, she has taken steps to make the message reality.

It is a tremendous honor, an extraordinary honor, to have the Attorney General of the United States with us tonight. Indeed, her appearance tonight speaks volumes about her commitment to the ideal of cooperation and communication between federal law enforcement agencies.

Ladies and gentlemen, the Attorney General

of the United States.

[Applause.]

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Thank you so very much. I'm honored to be and it's a wonderful experience for me now, having had the chance to travel around the country, to look out on an audience like this and see familiar faces and to remember the lessons that you taught me while I was in your community.

But most of all, I remember the people that I worked with in Customs in Miami. Of all the agencies, I sometimes think we had one of the best working relationships, and I will be very grateful as long as I'm in law enforcement for all the support you gave me during that time.

But more importantly, I think you helped me when I came to Washington because when I got sworn in, people said, what do you know about the federal system, how are you going to deal in Washington. I said, well, if you've been State Attorney in Miami for 15 years, you're going to have a little bit of knowledge from all the federal

agencies. And you've given me a good send-off and I'm deeply appreciative.

I'd like to talk to you in candid terms about where we've been and where we're going in terms of cooperation. As a local prosecutor, I looked at the federal agencies and oftentimes I saw turf battles. I saw fragmentation and duplication, people going in different directions without much coordination. As a local prosecutor, I too often saw a one-way street. We gave the federal agencies a lot of information, but it was sometimes difficult to get the information back, and I saw tensions between prosecutors and investigative agencies.

As I came to Washington, I faced new challenges. I faced a realization that crime and its impact were becoming global in nature. One of the first things I confronted was direct intelligence on the whole pattern of drug trafficking in this world, of Russian organized crime, of Asian organized crimes.

I dealt with issues involving discovery

and what the intelligence community had to provide us if we were to go forward with prosecutions, and I realized that what I had known as prosecution and what most federal prosecutors had known in terms of prosecution were going to be different, and that it would be required to be new and cooperative working relationships as appropriate and proper with the intelligence community and with the State Department. We were in a new era of crime-fighting in this country, and what happened here would affect others around the world and what happened around the world would affect us.

I saw as a I came to Washington the fact that there is marvelous new technology, but that law enforcement perhaps was not utilizing it as well as, say, others were doing it either in the private sector or otherwise, and that it was important to join together, that all of law enforcement join together to make sure that through research and development, we were ahead of the game.

Then I saw the terrible forces of

terrorism at the World Trade Center and then subsequently in Oklahoma City, and it's clear to me we have got so many challenges and there are so many problems with crime and the problems are so great that we've got so much to do, that we can't fight between each other about getting it done.

To that end, I spent a lot of time when I first took office addressing issues of cooperation in the Department of Justice. It didn't seem to me I could talk about other agencies' efforts without first talking about Justice Department efforts.

One of the first key questions that I faced as I came in was people asking me, are you going to merge the DEA and the FBI. I spent an awful long time on that issue. I heard from agents who came from around the country, DEA agents. I heard from supervisors. I talked to people who had been with DEA for a long time and who could give me perspective.

And I determined, no, those agencies should not be merged. DEA had a distinct and special and extraordinarily important mission and

it was doing a good job. But it was important for those two agencies to work together to make sure that their resources were being used in the wisest way possible; that intelligence would be exchanged; that equipment and other materials would be used in the best way possible, maximizing the limited resources that both agencies had.

I saw marvelous opportunities for the Marshals Service to work with the other two agencies, and to bring in the Border Patrol and the Immigration inspectors. There was so much that we could do if we worked together.

I would go into a community and I would find the Marshals had a fugitives task force and the FBI had a fugitives task force, and they didn't have any common priorities; they hadn't worked it out.

I determined to form an Office of Investigative Agency Policy for the Justice Department law enforcement agencies, as well as for the Bureau of Prisons, and to include the Bureau of Prisons and the United States attorneys. I think

we've had real success with this. We've been able to bring the agencies together. Thanks to Administrator Constantine and Director Freeh, we have made great, great progress in sharing intelligence information and linking our systems together so that we are developing really close cooperation.

As just an example, I discovered I had about four different airlines, and that didn't make too much sense. I had Immigration flying the people who were going to be detained for deportation in one place and the Marshals flying people to prisons in another place. And so we got everybody together through the Office of Investigative Agency Policy and we've got one airline, in effect, now distributing prisoners and detainees around the country, making it a lot more sensitive of the taxpayers' dollars.

We're talking about how we can function together with respect to frequencies, with respect to equipment, with respect to so many different issues. Now, we have a long way to go, I sometimes

think, but when I look back at the progress we have made in these last two years I realize that we can do so much if we respect each other, if we respect the mission and the work of each agency, and if we figure out who can do what best and how we can work together to get the job done.

But it was not too long after I had taken office that I was asked to meet with Customs officials. I was visiting a community and I sat down and had breakfast, and it was one of the most enlightening moments because I was told by this Customs representative, look what we could do if DEA and Customs could get together and start working together on problems as they come across the border. INS could work with Customs. Customs could then relate to the DEA and we could do so much.

And I came back to Washington and started talking about that, and it's amazing to see how Customs and DEA have gotten together, how they're working together on so many initiatives. You have referred to the one recent great example and there

are so many others as I talk to agents around the nation.

So it occurred to me that we should expand our efforts and include and work with the Treasury agencies in expanding our efforts to see how we can do best together what needs to be done. We now have meetings with Mr. Noble, with the Commissioner, with Mr. McGaw, and with representatives of IRS, and I think these meetings are beginning to develop a common ground and build a common bond so that we can get problems worked out. Yes, we sometimes fuss at each other. I sometimes think, gosh, he's being stubborn.

You're never being stubborn.

[Laughter.]

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: But we're talking and we're trying to sit down and figure out how to get it done.

What are the results? I think one of the most measurable results that I have seen is the development of the Anti-Violence Initiative. Violence is basically a local problem, a problem

for local law enforcement and for local prosecutors. But in so many places in this country, violence crosses state lines. It crosses district lines. It involves matters that can better be handled in some instances by federal agencies.

The Armed Career Criminal Act gives the federal agencies and federal prosecutors tools that a local prosecutor may not have. Federal agencies may have information that can be so important and so critical to the solution of local crime.

I will never forget my first months in office meeting with the new chief of police in Los Angeles, who advised me that his officers told him that as many as 40 percent of the homicides solved in Los Angeles were solved by information furnished by DEA agents relating to drug gangs, and it made me think what can we do, how can we get everybody together.

It doesn't mean the case has to be prosecuted in federal court. We don't need the credit. What is most important is that we get this

case prosecuted where it best belongs and where the evidence can best be presented, and so we did something unusual. We got representatives of the Treasury Department, Director Freeh, Administrator Constantine, and myself on the phone with SAICs from around the country, with United States attorneys, and said we are launching an Anti-Violence Initiative; we are going to coordinated together within each district. The United States attorney will reach out to state and local prosecutors and law enforcement. We will plan on how to use our resources, how we exchange information, how we develop priorities.

That's a little over a year old and the response that I am getting from around the nation from chiefs of police who are writing me from jurisdictions large and small--the response I got when I went to the National Sheriffs Association meeting in San Antonio recently is just overwhelming, and it is a signal tribute to all the men and women in law enforcement around this country who have been involved in this effort.

Sheriffs will tell me they don't care who gets the credit; they're giving me the information and where the case can better be prosecuted in federal court, I'm sending it over there and I'm getting my agents prepared, and they're sending the information to me and they're sometimes sending prosecutors and it's just the greatest working relationship I have seen. That's happening in so many districts. We've got to make sure that it happens in all districts because it can make such an extraordinary difference.

From that early meeting with that Customs representative, we have seen so much happen on the border. I went back to the Bureau and I went back to DEA and said why don't we sit down and make sure we're working together on the border the right way; that we're coordinating with the State Department, with the ambassador in Mexico; that we're doing it the right way. And then let's reach out to Customs and make sure that we cooperate and develop a system and a protocol that can really make a difference.

Commissioner, the reports that I'm getting back are that the working relationship is better each day, and we're dedicated to trying to do everything we can to form a full partnership with Customs where everybody is on a team that can get the job done on the Southwest border. I think we can make a difference and I think it is exciting and a tribute to so many people involved.

With respect to international cooperation, it was wonderful to be in Ottawa and to see so many people seated around the table talking about problems along the northern border--smuggling, drug trafficking, particular problems--and having other agencies praising Customs and saying what a great job you all were doing, and to hear the ambassador talk about it and to hear law enforcement talk about it. It really is a classic example of what can be done when agencies put aside credit-grabbing and start putting our country's interests first. Again, I am so impressed as I travel around the country and see that happening.

But we have some challenges yet. One of

the problems has been alluded to. So many agencies are going to have to do more with less. As we look at the globalization of crime, we realize that our presence is often required in so many different spots around the world. At the same time, the State Department's budget has been cut in the House markup by about 9 to 10 percent, and they are the host platform, if you will, for so many offices around the world.

How do we work with the State Department? How does Justice, how does Treasury work with the State Department to utilize the limited resources of the State Department around the world in the wisest way possible, eliminating fragmentation and duplication?

We're making some progress, but we've got to make more as we face the fiscal realities of the future. We've got to realize that we are in a global arena now and that no longer is it--it seems to me when I first started practicing law in 1963 the only cases handled in federal court were a lot of civil cases and bank robbery cases. You now

look at the docket of the Southern District of Florida and you realize it's a whole new world, and the whole new world has an awful lot of international implications and a lot of implications for the intelligence community.

We have got to do so much more in building that working relationship with those agencies, and doing it the right way, protecting law enforcement interests and doing it according to appropriate guidelines, protecting constitutional interests, and making sure that at the same time we work together when it is proper and appropriate. We can do so much if we move ahead and forge ahead to make that difference.

I have a dream, and one of the things that is interesting to me is people say, well, you all haven't really made drugs a priority. I think we have, but what we've also done is to say that we won't tolerate the violence spawned by drugs. We launched the Anti-Violence Initiative, while at the same time trying to do everything we could to enhance our drug enforcement efforts around the

world and around this nation.

And we're seeing results of that violence initiative now. We see violence going down in most major cities in this country. The figures in New York are staggering. They are an example of what can be done in one of the largest cities in the world, but at the same time we've got to recommit ourselves to our efforts with drugs. And how do we do it?

I'm so proud of what has been done by all the agencies involved in terms of Colombia and our international efforts in Burma. We've got to continue those, making sure that we have a coordinated approach that involves both enforcement and diplomacy in the right way and that the agencies work together in planning it. We've got to continue our efforts at the local level, particularly directing it toward drug gangs, violent drug gangs.

But here's what I saw from a distance just as I came to Washington. If you count a drug kingpin as a number 10 and count the little street

guy as a number 1, the federal agencies would oftentimes get 10, 9, maybe 8 or 7. The local agencies would get 1, 2, 3, and maybe 4, and then 5, 6, and 7 would sit in the middle and float around and attract a new kingpin here or there or everywhere. And nobody was looking at the whole organization and the whole scheme of things.

I have the dream in the not too distant future when the DEA, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and Customs will be joined together, working with the State Department as appropriate, in terms of international efforts that focus our resources in the right way, use diplomatic initiatives in the right way to force the issues with countries abroad, but at the same time that we look at this nation and take steps on an organized basis in this nation to put the dealers out of business.

There are some good efforts underway. New England has, I think, a marvelous regional effort looking not just at a particular state or a particular community, but the whole supply line

throughout New England. The issue on the Southwest border is another example.

But then I will go to another state, such as Wisconsin, which will say, there just doesn't seem to be too much coordination; so much spills out from Chicago into Wisconsin, but we can't get Chicago to pay much attention to us. We need to get organized in a more intense way, making sure that all the agencies are working together so that we have an international, a regional, and a local approach that makes sense, that links with law enforcement where appropriate, that can make a difference.

Another challenge that we face--I did a study recently of the number of task forces in this country. I've never seen anything like it. In one jurisdiction, the DEA has Redrum, which is "murder" spelled backwards, in which it is focusing in drug-related homicides. The FBI has the Safe Streets Task Force. Customs has something. The Postal Inspectors have something else. And I say, have they all talked together recently?

Then OCDETF is over here, and then there are names that I don't recognize. Then there are Berne Grant task forces in the smaller jurisdictions, and then somebody is paying overtime to local police officers. And I say why are you paying them overtime? They're doing the sting at 3:30 in the afternoon after they get off duty so they can get overtime, rather than at 2:30 in the afternoon.

We're going to have to develop an understanding of our task forces that have proliferated and make sure that we are using our monies as wisely as possible, eliminating as much administrative overhead as possible, and making sure that we get our people to the streets where it counts in forms and organizations that make sense. I think we can do it.

We need to work together to make sure that all of us have the infrastructure and the technology that can match wits with the sophisticated criminals that will emerge in the future. Again, I don't think we have caught up to

some of the sophisticated people that we will see emerge in this coming century in terms of technology that can bring industries to their knees, that can confuse automation systems, can botch up people's computers to a fare thee well, and generally causes an awful lot of problems. But I'm convinced that working together, we can do the job.

I've never been more convinced than I have since Oklahoma City. I have never been so proud of this nation. I watched this nation join together, most of the people to speak out against the violence that spawned that blast. I watched people around this country reach out to victims, to their survivors, to hold them and to help them begin to heal.

I talked to firefighters and doctors in Indianapolis who had gone to Oklahoma City to help for a week and two weeks, and they felt that they had done a thing that they would never forget. They were so moved by the strength and the courage of the people of Oklahoma City.

Commissioner Weise has talked about the attacks on law enforcement. As I told him a little bit earlier, I think sometimes there's an awful lot of noise and if you look under the noise, you see a great strength and a great, wonderful, magnificent, splendid courage among the people of America. They want their government to do right. They want their government to protect them, and they have a great respect and admiration for the law enforcement officers and the agents who do that job day in and day out.

I keep on my wall a statement from Abraham Lincoln that I will close with tonight because I think it stands us all in good stead. If I were to read everything bad that people say about me, I might as well close up the shop for business. I intend to keep on doing the best I can, the best I know how, and I intend to keep on doing it until the end. If the end brings me out all right, what people said about me won't make too much difference. If the end brings me out wrong, ten angels saying I was right won't make any

difference.

Thank you so much.

[Applause.]

COMMISSIONER WEISE: Madam Attorney General, thank you very, very much for such a moving address, bringing us all together, as you've done so well.

You know, having worked with Customs for a long, long time, it's a very special organization, and we say it's the oldest federal agency in all the government. We get arguments from the Marshals Service about what is the oldest federal law enforcement agency, but the first act of Congress, I think, was to establish tariffs and the second was to get somebody to collect them. So we think we're the oldest agency, and the thing that is most special to us is our ensign and we would like to present to you the U.S. Customs ensign.

Thank you so much for being here.

[Applause.]

[Whereupon, at 9:00 p.m., the proceedings were concluded.]