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DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

ADDRESS BY

THE HONORABLE JANET RENO,

U.S. ATTORNEY GENERAL

Crime Prevention Month Ceremony

Great Hall

Department of Justice

Washington, D.C.

Friday, October 6, 1995

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P R O C E E D I N G S

(11:20 a.m.)

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Thank you, Michael. Thank you for your leadership. Thank you for being a caring, committed citizen in this Nation.

And to you who have made this advertising campaign possible, thank you. The public/private partnership envisioned here is key to our success in whatever we do in Government. And to see this reaction as the private sector galvanizes, takes its creative ingenuity and puts it to work to address what I consider to be one of the most critical problems in America today, youth violence, gives me such hope that we will turn this epidemic around.

I am delighted to be a part of this kickoff for Crime Prevention Month 1995. And I like the theme very much -- crime prevention starts at home -- setting the stage for community action.

Ever since I came to Washington I have tried to direct the attention of the Department of Justice towards community. Not towards program. Not towards something that is just a structure. But towards a community. Towards people in the community. Understanding that the neighborhoods, the cities, the small counties of America, understand their problems better than we do in Washington. They understand their needs and resources. They understand

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1 what they need to get the job done.

2 And I suggested that it is Department of Justice's
3 responsibility to use our resources in partnership with
4 State and local governments, State and local law
5 enforcement, in the best way possible to enhance what people
6 are doing on the front line, in the streets and in the towns
7 of America.

8 But to do that local communities need additional
9 resources. It has been just a little over a year ago that
10 the Congress passed President Clinton's Crime Act, an act
11 that focused not just on punishment, not just on policing,
12 but on prevention as well. It focused on providing monies
13 for 100,000 community police officers in these next five
14 years.

15 We have already authorized 25,000 officers, far
16 more than people said we would be able to do in the first
17 year. We have cut through red tape. We have tried to work
18 with communities to design community policing programs that
19 were based on what the community said it needed. It might
20 be one deputy sheriff in a county. It might be 35 police
21 officers in a major urban city. But it was community
22 policing, wherein police officers went to the community,
23 formed the partnership, built the trust of the neighborhood,
24 built the trust of the citizens.

25 On this stage in this past year, I have had the

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1 opportunity to see the President of the United States greet
2 two young men who brought with them their community police
3 officers who they had told me in Dorchester, Massachusetts,
4 had made a difference in their lives and kept them out of
5 trouble and got them started off on the right foot. And I
6 will never forget that moment as those young men stood there
7 and told the President of the United States what a different
8 community policing and community police officers who care
9 had made in their life.

10 And now I am beginning to see it across the
11 country. As community police officers reach out in crime
12 prevention as well as crime detection efforts, making a
13 difference.

14 I was gratified to see that the Senate, this past
15 week, continued the President's COPS program. And I look
16 forward to making sure that we develop initiatives that can
17 make a difference.

18 To that end, I am very proud that the COPS program
19 focused on youth violence and recently announced the grant
20 of 10 grants to police departments across the country for
21 specific programs targeted at youth violence that we will
22 carefully evaluate and try to replicate across the Nation
23 as we show what can work.

24 It may be a strategy to get guns out of the hands
25 of children. It may be a program developed around the

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1 schools. But we are going to take the creative ingenuity
2 that exists in America today to get the job done.

3 That Crime Act also provided monies for efforts
4 against domestic violence. When we talk about crime
5 prevention, when we start to talk about stopping violence
6 in our schools and on our streets, it starts at home, just
7 as your theme suggests. And unless we raise the attention
8 of this Nation to domestic violence, to violence against
9 women, we are never going to stop it in our schools and on
10 our streets.

11 The child who watches his father beat his mother
12 comes to accept violence as a way of life. We have got to
13 turn that around. And I was so proud that last week the
14 President announced that this was Domestic Violence
15 Awareness Month as well.

16 Heightening America's sensitivity to this type of
17 violence, bringing the medical community, the criminal
18 justice community, and the private sector together to say
19 we are not going to tolerate this any more. We are going
20 to take action.

21 We have already distributed \$426,000 as the down
22 payment on that grant to each State in this country, for
23 expanded shelters, for innovative policing programs, for
24 domestic violence centers, again, based on what communities
25 know they need because they understand their communities

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1 better. I was gratified again to see that the Senate agreed
2 with the President and supported full funding of this
3 initiative.

4 In another effort, we see from these programs what
5 crack and drugs can do. We have seen with our own eyes what
6 they can do to a neighborhood, what they can do to a mother
7 who wants to be a good mother and make a difference in
8 raising her family.

9 Drug Court has been an example of the type of
10 prevention program that can work, of saying if you are a
11 first offender user, non-violent, we will work with you.
12 We will have a judge supervise you. We will provide
13 treatment. We will work with you in job training and
14 placement. We will get you back to the community with a
15 chance of success. But if you mess up, we are going to have
16 this judge supervising you and you are going to face
17 ever-increasing sanctions.

18 That program is working across the country. The
19 Crime Act expands it. And I was gratified to see that the
20 Senate agreed. We have got to make sure, as we go into
21 conference, that these efforts are continued.

22 As a result of efforts of Americans across this
23 country, of citizens, of young people who care, who speak
24 out, we have seen an overall reduction in violence in this
25 Nation in the last year that is very, very encouraging.

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1 But, ladies and gentlemen, we have seen something that is
2 very, very alarming.

3 Since 1985, we have seen an increase in this
4 Nation in youth violence that is staggering, just simply
5 staggering. And the tragedy with the violence perpetrated
6 by young people has also come the horrible phenomena, the
7 tragic phenomena of young people as the victim of that
8 violence.

9 And what makes this surge so very frightening is
10 that it occurred, for the most part, while the number of
11 young people in the age category of 14 to 17 was going down
12 in the United States. And as it was going down, the number
13 of youth committing homicide went up like this.

14 In this past year -- and the demographics of this
15 Nation make quite clear -- that the number of young people
16 in the age group of 14 to 17 will increase significantly
17 over the next 20 years. Unless we come together to prevent
18 this violence, we are going to see a more violent nation.
19 Because of your efforts, because of programs like this,
20 because of advertising campaigns like this, I think we are
21 going to turn it around.

22 But how do we do it?

23 You have put the finger on it. We have got to
24 start with the family. And to start with the family, we
25 have got to build strong families that can care for their

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1 children. We have got to make sure that those children have
2 the medical care they need to grow into strong, constructive
3 human beings.

4 All the ad programs in the world will not make any
5 difference unless we give the child a strong foundation with
6 which to react and a strong family with which to respond to
7 advertising campaigns that offer help and offer suggestions
8 as to what can be done.

9 There are encouraging signs. We see the number
10 of people in poverty, for the first time, going down after
11 some years. It is so important that we tell those people
12 who are working that are still poor that they will have an
13 earned income tax credit that will give them an opportunity
14 to be self-sufficient. We have got to make sure that we
15 continue the President's effort to provide support for poor
16 people who are working, who are working hard and trying to
17 make ends meet, to give their children a strong,
18 constructive base on which to grow. And we have got to make
19 sure that those efforts continue.

20 One of the greatest preventers of crime is a
21 strong education. We have got to make sure that the schools
22 of America continue to have the resources they need to train
23 our children to the technology that will make them
24 competitive with the rest of the world as we come into a
25 century of high technology that we never dreamed would exist

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1 when I was a child their age and wondering what I would do
2 when I grew up.

3 It is so exciting to see the opportunities that
4 we can hold out for our children if we give them the tools
5 to do the job.

6 We have seen what happens with statistics that
7 show crime rates during the day, during the school hours,
8 and then see what happens after 3:00, and the crime rates
9 start to go up. We have seen what has happened in America
10 with the single parent working, with both parents working,
11 and we know that from 3:00 to 6:00 in the afternoons and
12 sometimes in the evenings we have children who are not
13 supervised as we would want to see them supervised.

14 That Crime Act passed last year provided monies
15 for afternoon and evening programs that provided for
16 supervised activities, that can make a difference in our
17 children's lives, can provide them with the supervision,
18 the suggestion, the mentoring that they need to get started
19 on the right foot. We must expand that and never pull back
20 from that effort.

21 It has been so gratifying for me to go to
22 different places in this country and see young people at
23 work, developing peer mediation programs and conflict
24 resolution programs in conjunction with specialists in their
25 community. These programs can and are working. And we need

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1 to spread them across America.

2 If you can teach people how to spell, you can
3 teach people how to resolve conflicts without knives and
4 guns and fists. And we need to make sure that these
5 programs have the resources to continue.

6 One of the greatest single correlations between
7 delinquency and cause is between those who have dropped out
8 or are truant and those that ultimately commit a delinquent
9 act. When that kid is eight years old and truant for the
10 first time, too often in America we are sending the child
11 back to the school, the school calls home, the parent does
12 not come get the child, and the school sends the child home
13 on the bus and nobody does anything about it.

14 If we made a home visit with a community friendly
15 police officer or a social worker and a public health nurse,
16 we might find there a problem that we can solve quickly
17 before it becomes so entrenched that we cannot change that
18 family around. If we could make a difference in the life
19 of that family, we could do so much.

20 A community police officer working in a public
21 housing development can develop programs aimed at
22 prevention, can organize citizens and young people to say
23 no to violence, to say no to the graffiti that diminishes
24 their community. We can make a difference, ladies and
25 gentlemen. And the people who convinced me that we can make

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1 a difference are people like you. People who care about
2 this Nation, care about your community, and care about our
3 children.

4 When I first came to Washington, too many people
5 said to me, Janet, the problem is just so overwhelming.
6 Yes, if you look at a nation as a whole you think, what can
7 we do? But these people know they can do something. Each
8 one of us can do something. If it is nothing but mentoring
9 a young person, each one of us can make a difference. And
10 all Americans must accept the challenge, child by child,
11 family by family, school by school, block by block, city by
12 city, State by State, take back America for our children
13 again. And give them a chance, give them a community, give
14 them a nation where they can grow as strong, constructive
15 human beings.

16 Children are the toughest little people I know.
17 They can overcome so much if they are given half a chance.
18 Let us do more. Let us give our children a full chance to
19 show what they can do. And they will prove us so very
20 proud.

21 (Applause.)

22 (End of transcript.)

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