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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

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CELEBRATING PEER MEDIATION

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WITH ATTORNEY GENERAL JANET RENO

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March 3, 1997

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

2 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Good orning.

3 I just appreciate your being here so very uch
4 today. I' very, very excited about this
5 orning's program and about the tremendous
6 support for peer ediation and dispute
7 resolution that I've had a chance to see
8 firsthand in the D.C. Public School Syste and
9 as truly evidenced by your willingness to join
10 us here today.

11 General Becton and I have invited you
12 to be with us today to celebrate soe of the
13 ost powerful, effective, and inspiring tools
14 we've seen for fighting violence in our
15 schools, on our streets, in our comunities,
16 and even in our hoes.

17 I have learned firsthand fro young
18 people about the iportance of these programs.

19 And these young people are the best

20 instructors in the world. They're so excited.
21 They are so clear in what they are trying to
22 do.

3

1 I've been lucky enough to visit 11
2 schools here in D.C. -- high schools, middle
3 schools, and elementary schools -- that have
4 thriving dispute resolution programs. And I
5 hope to have the opportunity to visit more in
6 the coming months.

7 These students and the faculty that
8 have helped them have shown me how effective
9 peer mediation and other conflict resolutions
10 can be in resolving the problems and the
11 arguments that naturally arise among young
12 people. But they are also doing so much more.

13 Young people who learn how to resolve
14 conflicts cooperatively learn that they can
15 solve problems themselves, without having to go
16 to the principal or to the teacher. They learn
17 that they have some control over the problems
18 in their lives -- not just in their school, but

19 in their neighbor and at their hoe.

20 They learn and practice valuable
21 skills that serve the well for the rest of
22 their lives. And they learn how to resolve

1 conflict through listening, through talking,
2 through understanding, through proble-solving,
3 and not with knives and guns and fists.

4 I have been told, during y visits to
5 schools here in D.C., that schools with peer
6 ediation programs have seen a reduction in the
7 nuber of fights. Some have realized
8 reductions in suspensions and other
9 disciplinary actions.

10 "What happens if they won't go to
11 dispute resolution?" you'll ask a young
12 student.

13 "Well, they have to go the principal,
14 and they ay get suspended."

15 These results are siilar to those
16 that I have witnessed in y travels to other
17 parts of the country with active peer ediation

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18 initiatives in the schools.

19 These results are extremely
20 encouraging and very, very exciting -- through
21 probably not surprising to those of you here
22 today, and particularly to the young people who

5

1 know the power of dispute resolution.

2 Many of you may already have had some
3 experience with peer mediation. But I imagine
4 that there are some here who know a little bit
5 about peer mediation and dispute resolution but
6 would like to learn a lot more.

7 Today's program promises to be a
8 wonderful opportunity to see these young people
9 in action and to have some of your specific
10 questions answered.

11 General Becton, principals,
12 counselors, teachers, community and business
13 leaders, and others who have worked with these
14 young people, I want to thank you for your very
15 critical support.

16 It is such a thrill to be talking

17 with a iddle school class and suddenly here
18 coes General Becton, the superintendent. And
19 he is known; he has been there before, people
20 understanding. He's right there at the seen.

21 And you just have a sense, as the
22 students look up at hi, as the principal and

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1 the teachers sile, yes, we really can make a
2 difference with the people in the D.C. Public
3 School Syste.

4 It has been wonderful for e to see
5 teachers who are so terribly dedicated, who
6 care so very uch, who are just doing their
7 very best to give our young people a strong and
8 positive future; and counselors who ake a
9 difference; and people with the dispute
10 resolution and the dispute settleent program
11 that have done so uch -- it is just so
12 exciting -- and to the principals who try so
13 hard with such difficult circustances.

14 All I can tell you, fro my
15 experience in the D.C. Public School Syste, is

16 that, General, you've got great and wonderful
17 resources.

18 And with your leadership, I think
19 it's going to make such a difference, and I
20 really appreciate your being here today.

21 We would not be honoring all these
22 young people here in this great hall of the

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1 Department of Justice if it were not for the
2 efforts of so many people in this room.

3 There are many healthy, happy young
4 people in our Nation's capital who might not be
5 alive and well today without conflict
6 resolution initiatives that you have helped to
7 create.

8 I can think of no greater
9 achievement, no greater goal than saving our
10 young people from harm.

11 I hope each of you will continue and
12 expand your efforts.

13 Government officials, business
14 leaders, educators, and young people all bring

15 unique contributions to our overall fight
16 against violence. And we ust continue to work
17 together in this challenge.

18 But it's not just a fight against
19 violence. It is a fight to give our young
20 people a sense that they can participate in
21 their destiny, that they can work together to
22 solve probles to make life better.

8

1 And as I have gone to these schools,
2 I also ask, "If you were the Attorney General
3 of the United States, what would you do to give
4 you a better future?" And they have such
5 wonderful ideas.

6 I a so proud of the young people
7 that I have had a chance to visit and talk
8 with.

9 I a proud to report, too, that
10 President Clinton and the Departent of Justice
11 want to do everything we can in supporting
12 dispute resolution and peer ediation.

13 Many states have chosen to use their

14 Department of Justice Formula Funds to support
15 dispute resolution and peer ediation programs
16 in their schools.

17 And the Illinois Institute for
18 Dispute Resolution, thanks to a \$200,000
19 Justice grant, has been providing training and
20 technical assistance to local jurisdictions to
21 help establish conflict resolution progras in
22 schools.

9

1 I would like, also, to announce today
2 that the Department of Justice, in connection
3 with the Illinois Institute for Dispute
4 Resolution, will be available to work alongside
5 the organizations that already provide
6 technical assistance to schools here in D.C.

7 This should aid these wonderful
8 existing organizations in helping schools that
9 are interested in starting a dispute
10 resolution, peer ediation program but are in
11 need of assistance.

12 These organizations do such an

13 outstanding job. And we are hopeful that in
14 the future there will be such a demand for
15 these services that we will all join together
16 in this effort.

17 The President's new Anti-Gang and
18 Youth Violence Legislation, sent to Congress
19 just week, would authorize \$75 million to fund
20 initiatives such as violence intervention
21 programs, after-school and summer activities,
22 and dispute resolution programs.

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1 While we understand that at the
2 federal level our direct involvement is
3 limited, the President and I are committed to
4 providing communities with the tools and
5 resources that communities need to get the job
6 done.

7 I'm also very excited about President
8 Clinton's commitment to working with the
9 District of Columbia to improve this city and
10 to give our young people a strong and healthy
11 future.

11 General Becton, I think it's your
12 tie now to say a few words.

13 And thank you, again, for being here.

14 (Remarks by General Becton)

15 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I'll tell
16 you, while they're ovine it, I'm really not a
17 general.

18 And for the young people, I did a
19 study. And Justice Souter has done the sae
20 study, because he was an attorney general once.

21 It was the attorney who handled
22 general atters for the crown. That's the way

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1 the nae came about.

2 We're going to have three skits this
3 orning. The first school to demonstrate a
4 peer ediation scenario for us is Stevens
5 Eleentary. These students are going to show
6 us how easily play can turn into conflict on
7 the playground and will also deonstrate a
8 ediated outcome.

9 I had the opportunity to visit

10 Stevens, and I think you will be as impressed
11 as I was.

12 (Skit performed by Stevens
13 Eleentary School)

14 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: General
15 Becton says he's going to use those young
16 people in the School Board meeting.

17 Thank you all so very much. The
18 students of Stevens Eleentary, you are just
19 wonderful examples for us all.

20 The second school with us today is
21 Stuart-Hobson Middle School, another school
22 that I have been lucky enough to visit.

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1 At the junior-high/middle-school
2 level there are any causes of conflict. But
3 one of the most predominant involves rumors.

4 These Stuart-Hobson students will
5 show us what can happen when hurtful rumors
6 spread out of control. They will demonstrate
7 the conflict side only and will not perform a
8 peer mediation.

9 (Skit performed by Stuart Hobson
10 Middle School)

11 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I think I
12 could use the at the Department of Justice,
13 General.

14 Isn't it wonderful what young people
15 can teach us in the clearest, most human terms.
16 And we suddenly start thinking of the rumors in
17 the workplace that cause such confusion. And
18 from these young people we learn so much.

19 The final school demonstrating for us
20 today is Wilson Senior High School.

21 As you all know, violence is a very
22 real and very serious problem at the high

14
1 school level. These students will show us what
2 can happen when violence breaks out in the
3 school, and they will also demonstrate a
4 typical peer mediation.

5 (Skit by Wilson Senior High
6 School)

7 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: We are now

8 going to have a panel that I think you will
9 find very interesting.

10 (Beginning of panel
11 presentation)

12 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: May I just
13 ake a point there?

14 For adults who want to be trained, I
15 have seen what the Center for Dispute
16 Resolution can do, what you all can do. It is
17 one of the ost fascinating two or three hours
18 of training that I have been to. And it is so
19 rewarding. General Becton, this past sumer I
20 saw D.C. public school teachers give of their
21 own tie for two or three days, coming to
22 learn, and they found it a fascinating process,

1 too.

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2 (Continuation of panel
3 presentation)

4 STUDENT: And y other question was
5 addressed to Janet Reno.

6 I would like to ask you, how would

7 you feel if you had peer ediations in the
8 police station?

9 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Well,
10 actually, I should let the officer answer that
11 question.

12 But let e tell you, you have seen
13 what it can do in the schools.

14 If we could get it in the comunity,
15 if every police officer who served a particular
16 comunity learned mediation skills as well, it
17 could be such a wonderful tool for resolving
18 disputes in the streets, and during the
19 sumertime and in the hours when children were
20 not in school.

21 And what I have seen -- and you, sir,
22 ay have better examples -- but I have seen

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1 comunity police officers in the community
2 develop the respect of the young people, work
3 to solve the probles, prevent the violence,
4 prevent the fights that start the violence.

5 And it is a wonderful tool for police

6 officers, fro what I've seen.

7 But you ight want to comment, sir.

8 (Continuation of panel
9 presentation)

10 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Okay. Can I
11 ake just one suggestion? General, why don't
12 you and I talk to Chief Soulsby?

13 (Continuation of panel
14 presentation)

15 STUDENT: Do you approve of the
16 having a Spanish/English tea at Lincoln
17 Multicultural School?

18 GENERAL BECTON: Yes.

19 STUDENT: Janet Reno?

20 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Yes, and let
21 e tell you the reason why.

22 My father cae to this country when

17
1 he was 12 years old fro Denmark. He spoke not
2 one word of English. And people, then, teased
3 hi about his funny language and his funny
4 clothes and his funny background. He never

5 forgot that.

6 But it didn't take hi long to learn
7 English. And four years later, he was writing
8 beautiful English as the editor of the high
9 school newspaper. But if people had been
10 there, ediating and helping to communicate and
11 to understand, it would have ade such a
12 difference for hi.

13 Communication is the name of the
14 gae, and we've got to learn how to communicate
15 as the world's borders are shrinking. We've
16 got to learn how to comunicate in our schools,
17 in our comunity, and around the world to
18 achieve peace.

19 (Final portion of panel
20 presentation)

21 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Thank you all
22 for being here today.

1 The idea for this progra came from 18
2 students. As I asked the what they would do
3 if they were Attorney General, they said, "Have

4 a progra where people can learn about
5 ediation and about dispute resolution."

6 And you can see what I've been
7 hearing in the schools I've been to. Young
8 people have such wisdo.

9 Think of what could happen if through
10 conflict resolution we kept people out of the
11 prisons and used the dollars to build the
12 prisons that we use to build the prisons now to
13 build better educational opportunities for our
14 young people and spend ore for higher
15 education.

16 Two states in this country, Florida
17 and California, at least spend ore money for
18 prisons than they do for education. With this
19 progra, we can turn it around. Because of
20 these young people and their exaple, we can
21 turn that around.

22 And so, I would urge all the

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1 principals to, if you haven't already done so,
2 initiate peer ediation and dispute resolution

3 progras in your school. If you've already
4 done so, try to expand it and enhance it.

5 It's so wonderful to see a progra
6 that has been underway for four years. The
7 students know it, it's a tradition. In others,
8 it's just getting started, and there is an
9 enthusias. But it is a wonderful, wonderful
10 tool, and it can ake such a difference.

11 And General Becton and I can talk
12 further with Chief Soulsby and see what we can
13 do with comunity police officers -- such as
14 you, sir -- and others to expand it in the
15 comunity in the District of Columbia so that,
16 indeed, we can give our children a future of
17 peace.

18 General.

19 (Rearks by General Becton)

20 (Whereupon, the PROCEEDINGS were
21 adjourned.)

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