



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
REMARKS OF THE HONORABLE JANET RENO,
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES,
TO THE
NATIONAL NEWSPAPER ASSOCIATION

- - -

Ticonderoga Room

Hyatt Regency Hotel

400 New Jersey Ave., N.W.

Washington, D.C.

Friday, March 20, 1998

P R O C E E D I N G S

(Transcript commences with remarks in progress, at approximately 12:01 p.m.)

GENERAL RENO: If you think, okay, the schools in my community are doing just fine and everything seems to be working, we are going to have to make an adjustment in our children, in medical care, and in preventative medical care. Otherwise, the health care institutions of this country will be brought to their knees by our failure to provide preventative medical care, and preferring to wait until we expend the few dollars we have on expensive tertiary care.

So whatever we are doing, whatever our concern, I think it is imperative that we invest in children. When I first came to Washington and talked about this, people laughed at me and said I sounded more like a social worker than an Attorney General. Now, as group after group forecasts how important zero to three is, I think people are coming to understand why it is so important.

What have we done since I spoke to you in 1994? The first thing we did was to go to communities and say, we want to be a partner with you. We formed an anti-violence initiative where I instructed U.S. Attorneys and FBI and DEA SAC's to go to the community, to state and local law enforcement, to say: How can we work together as partners? We're not interested in the credit, we don't want turf. Instead, we want to operate on principles of federalism, provide data, provide technical assistance, shape grants, so that communities can build around these efforts. And I think we have made some successes.

But then we have made successes, I think as well, in other initiatives. But what are we doing now? One of the keys that everyone points out as being so vital are the first three years in a child's life, the ages of zero to three, when the child learns the concept of reward and punishment and develops a conscience. The Carnegie Foundation and others, in these ensuing four years, have come out with extraordinary studies showing that too many children in America are basically unsupervised during this time or have totally inadequate child care. I prefer to call it "educare."

President Clinton's child care initiative proposes \$3 billion over five years for early learning programs and for improving the quality and safety of child care for children in these earliest years. If zero to three is so critical, why do we continue to (inaudible). This is an important priority for us.

As a prosecutor, I used to look at investigations, and there were far too many young men or women that had just been adjudicated guilty of a serious delinquent act, far too many who had health problems along the way, who had not been treated immediately, and who had emotional problems as a result.

The President has worked to expand coverage for uninsured children and this year has asked Congress to help fund health outreach programs, including the use of schools and child care centers to enroll children and Medicaid. Improving child health is a key part of reducing delinquency.

Ladies and gentlemen, this is a nation that tells a 70 year old person, you can have an operation that extends your life expectancy by three years, but turns away the child of a working person whose parents don't have enough money to pay and don't have insurance by saying: Sorry, you can't have preventative medical care. That happens in too many instances and doesn't make much sense.

But improved child care and health care alone won't save the next generation from the problems I have described. As you know, most juvenile crime occurs between the time teachers let children out and the time parents come home. Check with your police chief and find out if, when there are not strong truancy programs, you see the burglary rate go up, you see the burglary rate go up right after school lets out. Unsupervised hours are not only too often wasteful, they are too often dangerous.

President Clinton's child care plan would quadruple current spending on after-school programs that keep young people safe and occupied in the afternoons and evenings.

When I go to a new community, I try to talk to young people, young people sometimes who have been in trouble or who are in trouble. I ask them what could have been done to have prevented the problem in the first place. Again and again they tell me: Somebody, some adult to talk to, somebody who understands how hard it is to grow up in this country today, somebody who can give me a pat on the back when I need it and give me a figurative kick in the back side when I need that as well, but doesn't put me down.

And the second thing they yearn for is something to do in the afternoons and evenings that's positive, that's constructive, that can keep them out of trouble.

The President is spearheading efforts to improve our educational system. But what happens if someone comes out without the job? Through the Department of Labor's School to Work program, the administration has been helping communities show children the links between what they learn in school and what they will be able to do at work. This lesson helps keep more young people in school and helps put them back on the track of supporting themselves and their families.

Fortunately, most of our children are good kids. They learn responsibility and accountability from their parents. But all children can also learn from other caring adults -- coaches, teachers, mentors, ministers, nurses, counselors, newspaper reporters who are volunteering their time because their editors know how important it is to contribute to the community.

Every child needs someone who is a responsible adult in their life. That is the key to delinquency prevention. It is also important to remember that only a very small fraction of juveniles in this country are violent. According to the FBI, less than one-half of one percent of America's teenagers were arrested for a serious violent crime in 1996. Clearly, those youngsters need to be treated fairly, firmly, with a sentence that fits the crime.

But it is also important that we recognize that most of our young people are wonderful and want to make a difference. And when close-up groups come to Washington, when other young people come to Washington, they come by the Justice Department, and I try to answer

their questions. It is so heartbreaking in these last two or three years to have these fine young people say: Why are we called the predator generation? Why do people think of us as super-predators?

And I explain to them that we don't, that we are trying to do everything we can to make the communities understand just what a gold mine we have in terms of children who are engaged in public service, who are participating in their school programs, who are Candy Strippers at school, who are making such a difference. And you can let the young people in your communities know how much we think of them.

The largest group of juvenile offenders, however, are not violent, they're not recidivists, and they do not need to be prosecuted as adults. These juveniles belong in delinquency court where, with the help of smart, targeted interventions, they can still turn their lives around.

But the approach must be comprehensive. A 15 year old can hear the stern word of a judge saying, I don't want to hear you or see you here again. He can undergo drug treatment and resolve to live a law-abiding life. But if we send him back to the apartment over the open air drug market where his mother's a crack addict and he got into trouble in the first place, guess what's going to happen?

We must focus on approaches that treat the juvenile and address his family circumstances and provide after-care and follow-up to those who come into the juvenile justice system, or else they will fail again.

Congress is considering new legislation to address youth violence. If that legislation is to work, it must hold children accountable while helping them reject crime in the first place.

Right now, while Congress seems poised to tell states exactly what to do to punish their young offenders, it has become curiously shy in the area of crime prevention. In fact, the bill pending in the Senate sets no funding for delinquency prevention aside. This is a serious mistake.

Everywhere I travel across the country, police chiefs, sheriffs, and now even the cops on the beat tell me that they simply cannot arrest and build enough jails to build their way out of the crime problem. They say that without the investment in children that I have described, especially those most at risk of crime, all the police and the prisons in the world won't make our communities safe.

Why, then, do some in Congress oppose targeting funding for prevention programs? First, they say that we cannot commit funds to delinquency prevention because we don't know what works. This is a myth. We do know from proven research that there are distinct, identifiable risk factors for delinquency, such as child abuse and neglect, severe and persistent

family conflict, and school failure, among others.

For example, one very promising program is the nurse home visitation program started in Elmyra, New York, and now being replicated in Memphis, Tennessee, in which nurses provide intensive treatment for new mothers. In Elmyra it was demonstrated that 15 years after the treatment abuse and neglect by the others was 75 percent less than in the control group and their children were delinquent 50 percent less often.

We also know that there are distinct identifiable protective factors that help even those children at the highest risk resist delinquency. As I said before, caring adults who stand by young people and encourage them and tell them when they've crossed the line, can make a huge difference.

In a recent study, an evaluation of the Big Brothers and Big Sisters program, these programs and similar ones like them have been proven successful in preventing delinquency. Everyone has a role to play.

There are so many pieces to this puzzle. Another piece is the whole problem of family and domestic violence. Some initial studies show that the child who watches his mother beat his father comes to accept violence as a way of life.

Congress and the administration have joined together in an effective way to get violence against women money out to every state in the nation. Every state is required to develop a plan, a plan that provides for shelter, that provides for special programs and centers that can interrupt the cycle of violence.

It is important that these programs also reach out to the child who observes the violence and try to interrupt that cycle before that child perpetuates it as he grows up.

The pieces can come together. In the last few years, the newspapers of America, community and larger publications, have published special series on needs of children, especially on the issue of child abuse, day care, teen pregnancy, and youth crime. You have done so much to focus America's attention on the issue.

My home town newspaper, The Herald, has just started another series, for which I applaud them. In 1993 the Detroit Free Press asked me to come to Detroit to keynote a day-long effort that produced a series, as I recall. One positive result was the Michigan legislature's creation of a children's ombudsman office which was assigned to review child welfare cases, respond to complaints, and issue annual reports to the governor. Since that time many of the ombudsman's recommended reforms have been adopted by the legislature, giving greater focus to the rights, needs, and safety of children.

One of the plaques that I've kept is not a plaque that was given to me. It was given to my mother by the Florida Bar, of all institutions, for a series that she did on the juvenile justice system and how it could be improved. That was written probably 40 years ago now. When I became the chief prosecutor in Dade County, a judge who had been a probation officer wrote to me with the tattered old clippings of my mother's series. I read them, and things hadn't changed. Yes, they had changed a little for the better in the five years that followed. But without the constant vigilance of the American free press, things will only slide back. And it is so important that you continue to report on the problems of your community, on the violence, and on how we can change it and what is working.

Juvenile justice is primarily a local issue and there are many stories that community newspapers can be telling. For example, the local business who is providing child care for their employees. Have you profiled the local minister who has opened up his church for after-school activities? Have you featured the teenagers who are organizing computer classes for their fellow students and for some of their parents' friends? Although it might not seem readily apparent, all of these stories can help us fight crime.

One of the things that I love about community newspapers is that they remind me of the Pine Tree News. I couldn't write, but I helped compose the Pine Tree News that my brother and I put together when we were ten and nine years old. We lived out in the country, but we had enough neighbors, though some distance away, that we could write about Mrs. Brooks' pigs and what was happening to Mrs. Jones.

I understand even better as I have had a chance to come across this nation on so many occasions what that community newspaper, with the heart and soul and understanding of the community, can do. I hear so many inspiring stories from police and prosecutors, from parents and teachers, and especially from young people who are making such a difference.

I have met with youngsters who are working to develop peer mediation programs in their schools to cut down on the number of school yard fights and teach their classmates to resolve their differences without using knives, guns and fists.

Something exciting is happening in this country. People are learning to tone down their arguments and increase their problem-solving communications skills. Lawyers at the Department of Justice, in programs that we have initiated, are learning how to mediate rather than to litigate. They are learning how to solve a problem rather than to ascribe blame.

Schools here in the Washington, D.C., area are teaching teachers and students how to resolve conflicts. I regularly go to a different public school to encourage them in conflict resolution.

Find out what is being done in your community, what your local bar association is

doing. In San Antonio, I had an opportunity to visit with high school students who had participated in conflict resolution programs put on by the local young lawyers association.

I love the law and I love lawyers, but I don't like greedy, indifferent lawyers who like to pick fights. I like lawyers who are peacemakers and problem-solvers.

I love newspaper editors. I don't like newspaper editors that are muckrakers. I like newspaper editors who identify problems and help to solve them by constructive, thoughtful inquiry.

I think we can all join together and bring the rhetoric down in America and increase the problem-solving for the benefit of all our children, for the benefit of all our citizens. But whatever you do, don't give up. Prodding government, asking us questions, making us do better, keeping us on the straight and narrow, focused on what we should be doing to serve the American people, you and your colleagues across this country make the First Amendment a living, breathing set of words that have made such a difference to us all, and I thank you very much.

(Applause.)

VOICE: The Attorney General has agreed to take a couple of questions. We've got about ten minutes, and we really appreciate her taking this extra time.

GENERAL RENO: Yes, sir?

QUESTION: One of the problems we have in our industry is access to juvenile records to report on things that are happening with the problems in our local communities. For example, acts of violence on a school campus; because of the privacy of records, we don't have access to a lot of that information.

My question is, would you be willing to use your bully pulpit at the Federal level to encourage your colleagues at the state level to open up some of those laws so that we can do more in-depth reporting about what's happening?

GENERAL RENO: I think this is one of the most difficult issues of all, because you don't want to label a child, particularly in a smaller community setting where they become labeled and it's difficult for them to toss the albatross from around their neck. I'm grappling with the issue right now because many of the hackers in the cybercrime area are youngsters, they are juveniles, and I think they have no sense that anything is going to happen to them. How do I publicize that?

What I will do is, I'll get your name and telephone number and follow up with you, and

perhaps you can convey the information to the rest of your colleagues as to what is being done around the country to address this issue.

Not just you, but police officers, and others in the community, are concerned and this is something that I think can be effectively addressed while at the same time giving the child a fresh start.

MS. BUSHEERS: My name is Erica Busheers. I'm the editor of The Daily Tarheel at the University of North Carolina.

One issue that we are very interested in is the issue of crime and justice on college campuses. Most universities and I think the Department of Education believe that universities are like a microcosm, where students who rape or assault other students are not subject to the laws of this country and can be punished in secret, in secret courts.

What do you think about that?

GENERAL RENO: Well, I had occasion to speak to representatives from Florida's various state colleges and universities, and what we tried to do in Miami is really form a partnership with university police, with the authorities at the university, and with the student government, to make sure that, where it was appropriate and where justice would be done, the university took care of its problem, but that we worked with the university, worked with the victims, to ensure that justice was done in the criminal justice system when that was appropriate.

I think, again, particularly when you're talking about young people, it's a good balance, but it's going to require people communicating and talking together, not interested in the turf but interested in solving the problem.

For example, one of the problems that we've tried to address in this past year has been the drugs that induce date rapes and cause problems, and trying to do public service announcements and other features that get the message out.

You've just given me an idea about what we might do. The First Amendment at work again. I would be interested in what you thought might be useful in helping to focus on this issue. I'd very much like our Office of Justice Programs to follow up with you to see what we might do. So if it's useful, be thinking of ideas, and I'll get back to you.

Any questions? Yes, sir.

MR. ROSENBERG: Jerry Rosenberg, San Diego Jewish Times.

You were talking about the need for there to be bipartisan support for the programs

that you outlined at the beginning of your talk. What lines of communication do you have with those people who, for a variety of reasons, are not supporting those particular programs? And are you prepared to make those who are opposed to it public, so that you can influence public opinion and convince them to go along with your thinking?

GENERAL RENO: The way I have tried to do it, and sometimes it's slower rather than faster, is through the Crime Act of 1994.. Through this Act, we were able to get bipartisan support and we achieved some good results that provided for prevention. Now, as part of the subsequent years it has been difficult to get the dollars designated for prevention.

But, what I would really prefer to do is try to solve the problem by thoughtful collegial discussion, and we're making some progress. I think the debate will become more clearly defined and at some point it may be appropriate to have a public thoughtful and constructive debate on the issue. But I don't think it's quite time yet.

I think, again, the important thing is to show people that prevention can work, that punishment by itself won't make a difference. Police officers are a wonderful source of support for this. It is just so important that we not get into the shrill debate and the blame-casting that I think obscures the issue.

MR. BARBIERI: Jim Barbieri from Bluffton, Indiana.

Our police chief was one of 32 that just went to your conference in Arlington on missing children, and our city has obtained two police officers through a program to put more police on the streets, and our neighboring city of Fort Wayne has done this to an even greater extent. We have a Democratic administration, they have a Republican administration.

The problem, so we're not short of cooperating and appreciating the programs that are being done, is that we encounter and we see that while your programs and your work have a great deal of credibility, the President and the administration have no credibility. I don't know, I have never been able to find anybody that thinks the President is telling the truth or that the system works.

I think this is what's disillusioning the young people. When I was a kid I would not think of taking something that wasn't mine, but we've had time and time again shown that the younger generation today believes it's okay to take it if you don't get caught. And we've had people escaping from crime because they beat the rap. It seems to be that the answer to all of this is, it's the economy, stupid, that makes it okay.

Mayor Helmke suggested in a recent message that the first two lines of the fence aren't the police or the prosecution, but they're the individual's conscience and the family. Don't we need to address those things as a real way of getting at the crime situation and the youth

problem?

GENERAL RENO: Yes. That's precisely what we're trying to do, recognizing that one of the problems, as pointed out by so much of the research that's been done, is that our children are alone and unsupervised more than ever before, and at the same time they are faced with greater risks in terms of guns and drugs that didn't exist when you were a boy or didn't exist in the measure that they do now.

That's the reason it's so important that we pursue efforts to ensure appropriate, constructive, educating child care for all those youngsters who have not had it. That's the reason it's important that there be caring adults around those in elementary school, those in high school, and that we provide constructive opportunities with supervision for our youngsters.

There is so much that we can do if we reweave the fabric of community around our children. And you make a very important point, that before the prosecutor, before the judge, comes the teacher, comes the person next door, comes the family member. That's the reason it is so important to continue what Congress and the President have done in terms of focusing on family violence and taking steps to eradicate it and to interrupt the cycle of violence. We can do so much if we work together to solve problems.

MR. CRAIG: (Inaudible) Craig, Tullahomuth, Tennessee.

Mine is not a question, but more a personal note. I'd like to tell you something that perhaps you don't know about your mother. I am from Miami. I worked with your mother 35 years ago, and I started in the composing room in the teletype department, and there was always two reasons why we wanted Reno's copy: one, that it was clean; and secondly, it was always interesting.

(Applause.)

GENERAL RENO: Thank you very, very much.

QUESTION: Earlier you had stated that you didn't want to label juveniles. But under the prison system and other public sector rehabilitation departments, such as DORS, you cannot bill insurance companies without providing them a label from the DSM-4.

GENERAL RENO: I'm not sure what that form is.

QUESTION: The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of -- the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual. It's often used in psychotherapy.

GENERAL RENO: I'm not sure how that relates in your state. Forgive me. Most of the information with respect to juvenile records is governed by state law and I'm not sure how it relates in your state.

QUESTION: Okay, in Illinois the prison population and in departments such as Department of Rehabilitation Services, otherwise known as DORS, you cannot bill an insurance company without providing them an access one, two, three, four diagnosis.

GENERAL RENO: Well, my understanding would be then, if that's what's required, that the state of Illinois probably requires it.

QUESTION: But isn't that providing a label on the juvenile?

GENERAL RENO: No, because I think it's incumbent upon most, so far as I know, the health care industry, and the confidentiality of medical records, particularly as people become involved in one HMO where records are collected together. This is a separate subject that is acquiring great attention across the country.

I think it's important that medical records, unless there's a particular reason for which the subpoena can be obtained or otherwise, that medical records be kept confidential as well.

QUESTION: But the child sees the diagnosis that they were given, and I think that automatically makes them feel they are labeled with this.

GENERAL RENO: Sees what diagnosis?

QUESTION: They see the access one diagnosis, such as if it is schizophrenia or if it is alcohol dependency. I just think that it labels the child. That child automatically gets a label.

GENERAL RENO: Why does the child read the insurance form?

QUESTION: Well, because their counselor tells them what their label was.

GENERAL RENO: Well, why does the counselor tell them what their label was?

QUESTION: I didn't hear the question. Could you repeat the question.

GENERAL RENO: Why does the counselor tell them what the label was?

QUESTION: Because in therapy sessions that's just kind of the way it goes.

GENERAL RENO: Well, I think you should talk to the counselors.

MR. VAN LEER: Bob Van Leer from Gold Beach, Oregon.

I see you've just appointed another special prosecutor. Is there any way that you can form an office of special prosecutors instead of having a number of individuals going off, each in their own directions, and all with an unlimited drawing account on the Treasury?

GENERAL RENO: Congress I think will consider the reauthorization of the Independent Counsel Act next year and I think it will be appropriate at that time to raise issues. My understanding is that some have proposed just what you propose.

I have made it a point while the Act is not under consideration for reauthorization not to think about what it should be, but to think about what it is, so that I implement it the correct, objectively correct way. But one point that we have made to people who have inquired is that there must be some means of budgeting. I have got to submit a budget to Congress. I have got to live within that budget. And there has got to be some budgeting procedure that applies as well to independent counsel.

But I think it will probably be the subject of considerable discussion next year in the reauthorization process.

One more question.

MS. DUVAL: My name is Brea Duval and I'm with the East County Journal. Right now I am a junior in high school, and it's a very small town that I live in. When most people think of small towns, they think of like the regular boy next door, but that's not the case in this town, because I could be walking down the halls and I will see just young freshmen that are no more than 13 or 14 and they will be having sacks of pot or whatever in their hands and they'll be distributing it.

I was wondering if there is anything at all being done in small rural towns and what-not as related to drugs.

GENERAL RENO: One of the points that I made when I came to office was to remember all the small towns in Florida that I knew and that we would not forget rural America and the small towns of America, the rural counties of America. The community policing initiative in fact required that appropriate distribution be made to the smaller jurisdictions, and a number of community policing initiatives across the country have been instrumental in reaching out to schools and, with the schools and police working together in partnership, in constructive partnerships, much has been done with respect to drug usage in the schools.

It doesn't do any good to get it out of the schools if it only spills out to the streets. If the child is truant, if the child leaves school in the afternoon, and then young people like you walk home from school, it's not going to solve the problem. So we've got to develop more comprehensive efforts within the community.

Again, I look at it as a building block. The communities have to be involved. Their citizens have to be involved in taking responsibility for the problem. Community policing can make a difference. We're trying to make sure there is adequate money available for drug treatment for those youngsters who need it and whose parents can't afford it, because for as many as you see, there are others who are desperately in need for treatment, who would be willing to undertake it, but don't have the money to afford it. So that is an effort that is under way.

We're trying to expand the concept of drug court for the child who is arrested and charged with possession of drugs. We developed a drug court in Dade County in 1988 that has now spread across the nation, and it operates on the good old-fashioned carrot and stick approach. It says: You can come to the drug court, we will work with you, but you're going to have to test for drugs each day until you test clean for a certain period of time. We will continue to test you on a random basis, we will work with you in job training and placement, we will work with you if you've dropped out of school and getting a GED. We will work with you in terms of preparing you to get off on the right foot. But if you mess up, you're going to face a more certain punishment each time you do.

Programs like that can work. But the key to it, it seems to me, are two points: One, the community has to be involved, because after they leave the drug court program, if they can't get a job because it's a small town and everybody knew so-and-so had a prior record for drugs, if they can't get a job, they're just going to get into more trouble.

So it's looking at it in a common sense way. For the 14 year old in your school who commits a serious crime, they should know that the judge means what he says or she says and that there's going to be a very firm punishment that fits that serious crime.

But even if that works and we get them into a detention facility that's the best in the country for three years, if they come back to that small town without support, with parents who are not involved, it's going to be difficult again for them to get off on the right foot.

So it's piece by piece by piece, with the community joining forces in all of its sectors -- the private sector, the police, the schools, the mayor, the business person, and the newspaper editor.

Thank you again very much.