



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

Press Conference

THE HONORABLE JANET RENO, ATTORNEY GENERAL

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9:32 a.m.

P R O C E E D I N G S

(9:32 a.m.)

VOICE: Good morning.

VOICE: Good morning, Ms. Reno.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Good morning.

One of the reasons that youth violence has dropped 2 years in a row is that people everywhere are pulling together to help young people keep on the right path. But the tragedy last Thursday, in Springfield, Oregon, reminds us again that we have more to do -- more to fight violence by children, more to stop violence against children, and more to prevent violence among children. We have got to go to the heart of the problem, and focus on what works, to help children resolve their frustration, their anger and their conflict without violence.

That effort has to be part of a comprehensive, integrated strategy for fighting youth violence. For some time, I have worked very hard to highlight community programs that really work. I want to take a few moments now, and in the future, to talk to you about some of the promising efforts that we see occurring around the country.

Today I want to highlight a program called Save our Streets that is working right here in the District of Columbia. It takes juveniles who are charged with a weapon offense and provides them with 16 weeks of education about the juvenile justice system and nonviolent conflict resolution. Save our Streets helps young people get back on the right track. It deals with troubled young people face to face, and gives them the tools they need to stay away from crime and violence.

According to a recent study, young people who stick with the program for at least 3 weeks are 90 percent less likely to be arrested on a gun charge, and are rearrested one-third less often on other charges. Save our Streets is making a difference. And if its success continues, it is going to help save lives and cut crime.

But we have more to do. We need Congress to act on President Clinton's juvenile justice legislation, which offers a comprehensive approach that includes targeted funding for crime prevention and intervention programs. We need to see other programs, like Save our Streets, develop across the country. But we also need to save our young people from indifference, conflict and violence. And if we pull together, I know we can.

Joining me today are two people whose organizations are helping to run Save our Streets. They are Marge Baker -- and we welcome you -- President of the National Institute for Dispute Resolution; and Ed O'Brien, who is the co-Executive Director of Street Law, Inc. In addition, I am very pleased to be joined by Detective Thomas Webb of the Metropolitan Police Department, who works directly with young people in the Save our Streets program.

Ms. Baker, we are delighted to welcome you, and we would appreciate your thoughts.

MS. BAKER: Thank you so much.

We are extremely excited about the promising results of this program, which was funded by the Metropolitan Life Foundation as part of its Positive Choices grant-making program.

And we are extremely grateful to the Attorney General for her commitment to and support of conflict resolution education in general. We could not have a more stalwart supporter than the Attorney General.

The results of the Save our Streets program project affirm the value of conflict

resolution education in helping to create safe schools and communities. And think, if this intervention with young people, who are very much at risk, can have the kind of impact it did -- a 90 percent reduction in rearrest rates for weapons offenses -- then imagine, just imagine the impact of conflict resolution as a prevention strategy if it were embedded throughout the entire K through 12 educational experience.

We are extremely excited about the prospect of bringing that result to bear, and want to work with the Attorney General and others to try to make that a reality. And we thank you very much for the opportunity to highlight the results of this program.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Detective Webb, you are the one who is seen it firsthand.

MR. WEBB: Yes, ma'am. I appreciate you inviting me down here today.

This program helps kids from the inner city who are bombarded daily by all forms of violence, from shootings, stabbings, rapes, domestic violence, to cope and better deal with conflict. The program sets the kids in a classroom where they interact in a form where -- they take part in a class; they are just not talked to. It places them in a position of authority, as a police officer in one class, and teaches them what we go through as law enforcement.

And we play the children on the street or the subjects on the street who they have to deal with. And it is kind of a role reversal, and it shows them what the authority figures have to go through. And it helps me to show what the kids are going through, what they are thinking. And it helps me communicate with them.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Thank you.

Again, it is so important that we realize, if we are going to make programs like this have a lasting impact, that we have got to develop comprehensive efforts in the communities across America. But as we highlight the building blocks of comprehensive community programs, I think the sharing will enable us to spread efforts like this throughout the Nation.

QUESTION: Are there programs in other cities similar to the one in the District here, that you have described?

MS. BAKER: We think this is fairly unique. What we did is we took -- we combined a curriculum in conflict resolution education and embedded it in a 16-week course in law-related education. So, helping the young people who are caught up in it right now, in the middle of the juvenile justice system understand that system, understand the players in that system, understand their way around it, understand the legal framework that they are working within.

So, it is very, very relevant to them. And then we embedded in that lessons around

conflict resolution. And so that unique combination of creating the relevant learning opportunity for the young people we think is what made quite a difference here.

QUESTION: This success rate covered over how many months --

MS. BAKER: Six months out.

QUESTION: -- and how many children were involved?

MS. BAKER: Six months out. And there were about 200 young people in the program.

QUESTION: Two hundred. What is the age range of the kids? And when they first go into the program, are they skeptical that there is other ways besides physical weapons to solve their problems?

MS. BAKER: The age range is 13 to 17. And the kids are very skeptical. I brought with me a copy of an article written by one of the young men who participated in the program. And he says outright, he said, I did not believe this stuff when I first got in. And then, their teachers, who are just marvelous, and the resource individuals, like Detective Webb, who come in and work with the kids and really help them think about the situations they are in and help them think about what might the alternatives be, what else could I have done. And they start answering that question for themselves and, together with their peers, they start interrupting -- they start gaining the capacity to interrupt that initial gut reaction, which is anger, which is to be violence.

And so the conflict resolution piece of it helps them unpack that initial response, de-escalate, and think about, well, what are the alternatives? What are the consequences here?

And as Detective Webb was saying, being able to hear from a police officer, walk in that police officer's shoes, understand what that police officer is experiencing; and then have that role flipped, and have the police officer able to understand what the young person is experiencing, you have the makings of an ability to start de-escalating a conflict instead of escalating it.

MR. WEBB: It really helps them in the first few moments of a conflict, where normally they react, gee, now they are thinking about what they are going to do instead of just reacting to their stimulants.

QUESTION: Detective Webb, is it automatic that any person between 13 and 18, in D. C., who is arrested on the first gun charge goes to this program -- in essence, is sentenced to this program -- as an alternative to whatever else the sentence would be?

MR. O'BRIEN: It is part of their indoctrination to the justice system. And they are put in the system and they are shown and guided through the system, because it is a first-time offense.

QUESTION: Do you find that it has any effect on -- I am sorry, I cannot hear you very well.

MS. BAKER: I just wanted to clarify that these are pre-adjudication cases, so the young person who is arrested, it is a pre-adjudication. So, they are directed to this program pending the resolution of their case.

QUESTION: Is it part of a plea bargain -- (off microphone)?

MS. BAKER: No. No. It is absolutely not.

QUESTION: Is it automatic for everyone who is arrested on a first gun charge? There are not some who you think are better candidates who then go into this?

MS. BAKER: That is correct. Everybody is directed to it.

QUESTION: Okay.

MS. BAKER: And stays as long as their case is pending.

QUESTION: And, Detective Webb, if I could just ask my second question. Do you find that, as a result of going through this program, the young people that do, have a different attitude about the police?

MR. WEBB: Oh, most definitely. I was talking earlier that the children, after they go through the program and they are done, through the system and sentencing, I see them on the streets and they actually come up and talk to me, whereas before it was a more adversarial role we were playing. I was an authority figure and they were on the street. And now they come up and say, how are you doing, Detective Webb? And they are not afraid to come up and talk to me.

QUESTION: So, all of these children were arrested on gun charges?

MR. WEBB: Yes.

QUESTION: And so roughly 200 arrests over what time frame?

MS. BAKER: I'm going to say 18 months -- I'm not positive.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I will ask Bert to make sure we give you the accurate figure on that.

QUESTION: What is the percentage of girls?

MS. BAKER: I do not know.

MR. O'BRIEN: It is low. I think the percentage of girls is, you know, probably 10 percent, something like that. But it has been growing in recent years.

I would add something to a previous question. And that is about attitudes towards the police and others. Law-related education is very much a part of this. And the Justice Department has funded a national, and does continue to fund, a national law-related education program. That has been evaluated to show that it changes attitudes towards the law, towards authority figures, et cetera.

Combining that with the conflict resolution skills for the first time here and taking on what -- well, when we started this, we were quite skeptical ourselves -- a little skeptical ourselves, I should say -- that it would work with gun charges. But focusing on the gun issues, making them think, bringing resource people in, like Detective Webb, bringing the conflict resolution skills in, has really made a very exciting difference.

MS. BAKER: One young person, for example, said, I have some idea of what to do now if somebody asks me to carry the gun for them. I have some responses. I know how to handle that situation differently than I might have before I was in this course.

QUESTION: I'd like to step back for a second. As you speak to the need for a program like yours, the notion of 200 kids over 18 months having weapons, firearms, should we be shocked by that?

MR. O'BRIEN: I think we should be shocked by the number of cases with weapons in this country, yes.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I think that is one of the issues that we have got to confront. I think it is clear from the research that with the advent of the crack epidemic in the early eighties we saw a proliferation of guns that got down into the hands of kids. And I think we have got to do everything we can to make sure that kids understand what guns do, that they are not influenced by television, where they think that there is no consequence with respect to guns. They have got to understand that they should not possess guns unless there is a legal, authorized, supervised use of them.

And I think it is clear from what we are seeing that this is one of the issues that must be addressed in every community.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, I understand there is going to be a resolution in Congress which will be aimed to address this problem, and also -- (off microphone) -- the effect of weapons. What is your reaction to those ideas?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I have not seen the proposed resolution, so I cannot comment on that. But I think what is clear -- and I think Detective Webb has touched on it -- we have got to reach out to our young people, those that fear, those that may have been the victim of some assault, and make sure that they feel they can come forward.

Wherever I go, I try to talk to young people who have been in trouble or who are in trouble. And again and again -- and you have heard me say this these Thursday mornings -- what they say they need is someone who can talk to young people, someone who knows how to listen to them, who can respect them, but also discipline them when it is appropriate, somebody that they can relate to. And I think it is incumbent upon us all to figure out how we can better communicate with young people, holding them accountable, but giving them the support and the encouragement and the foundation they need to grow as strong, constructive human beings.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, I'd like to ask another question. Concerning the availability of drugs, the type of drugs being used, about toxicity of these young people when they are using guns, are they basically stoned when they are in possession of firearms? And just generally what is it like?

MR. WEBB: Generally, the kids on the street, a lot of the younger ones, are in fear of all the violence they are seeing. So, they feel they have to arm themselves. They do not feel like the system is working for them. And that is what the program is trying to do is say, hey, we are here for you. We are wanting to communicate. We are not what you think you see on TV about the police and the system -- and trying to help them.

But, generally, the younger children are not using drugs. They have weapons, or they see them, because they feel not safe.

QUESTION: In regard to that question. Ms. Baker, earlier you said one young person said, now I know what to do if somebody says, here, hold this gun for me. If you are 13 years old and you live in this neighborhood and there are some characters there that really scare you, and one of them who has, like, bullied you in the past and may bully you in the future or threaten your life says, here, hold this for me, how does a 13-year-old resolve that situation?

MS. BAKER: It is very, very tough. I mean, these kids are confronted with daily violence in their community. And their sense of safety is at risk. And that is something where we are saying that fundamentally this a community issue and takes all parts of the community, trying to create an environment that is a safe and healthy environment in schools and in communities for the young people.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Let me give you one thought there. In communities where community policing is really established, where there is an officer in a neighborhood that young people can relate to, that has been a very effective mechanism in trying to deal with the situations that you describe, whether it be the young person who does not know what to do when the big bully gives him the gun or the elderly lady who is afraid to come out to community meetings.

Communities are being made to feel safer because of good community policing. And I think that is another one of the building blocks. But, in addition, just think of what we could do with resources if we were able to develop programs where the community police officer kept them out of trouble doing what Detective Webb is doing with them now.

QUESTION: Could I ask a point for clarification here? The school incidents that we have seen over the last few months really have got nothing to do with it, I mean you are talking about inner city kids, kids that are involved in violence, and then we have got kids who may -- have troubles -- it seems to me a big difference between what you are talking about and some kid out in Idaho who decided to go and blow away his classmates.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Look at what might have happened in Springfield if there had been a detective program. For each community the building blocks will have to be assimilated. Each case is going to be different. In some instances we will not find the key that could unlock and prevent the tragedy. In many instances, if we use our common sense, the same situation exists in the heartland of America as in an urban city. Sometimes it is going to be different.

But it is finding the pieces and, most of all, in trying to teach people -- the basic effort here is how do you teach people to control their anger and not use guns? And that is common to the whole problem that we see.

MS. BAKER: And the other thing I would like to add to that is this was an intervention strategy. This was an intervention with kids who are already in trouble. Think what you could do if you could embed the skills and the understanding about conflict management in kids from the get-go, so it was part of their educational experience, it was part of what they learned. So that when they came out of middle school or high school they had this skill set. It was not a question of intervening at a point where they are at risk, it was a question of giving them the right skills to prevent -- as a prevention strategy.

MR. O'BRIEN: To follow up briefly on that, we believe that this curriculum and this program can be taken into schools. We work now -- the Street Law program is all over the country in schools, but we -- this particular curriculum could be added especially to schools where there are kids that potentially are like the kid that we saw last week. So, I think we need, in community settings, programs like this, in court, for first-offender settings, but also in schools. It is very important to get every kid to focus on the issue of guns, the issue of violence.

QUESTION: Is there a cultural component to some of this? I mean, here in D.C., we have got ethnic gangs, you have got kids from Central America, you have got kids from Asia. When you work with these children and you go through this role playing and all of these things, is there particular attention paid to some of the ethnic differences and cultural differences?

MR. WEBB: No. Really, it is amazing, because when we are on that level, it does not really come into play. It is like color is not a factor, and we are just dealing with being people and communicating.

MS. BAKER: I do want to say that many of the role-players the young people helped design. So, as this curriculum was being built, the role-players changed to reflect their cultural settings. So, there was that aspect to the curriculum development.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: So, I do not feel like -- you do not feel like I am cheating you of time to ask other questions, I want to point out I am going to have to leave here at about quarter past 10, to go speak to about 2,500 youngsters on the whole issue of how we resolve conflict.

(Laughter.)

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: But I do not want to cheat my friends.

QUESTION: Just one more, please.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Well, here would be my suggestion. Why don't you ask me questions now if you have any, and then perhaps Ms. Baker and Detective Webb and Mr. O'Brien would be willing to stay.

QUESTION: I have one for you on this subject.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Okay.

QUESTION: You raised the role of Congress earlier in your remarks. Congress, as you know, is working on another aspect of this same problem. There is legislation that they are working on up there dealing primarily with the gun side of the equation, dealing with trigger locks, a mandatory requirement for trigger locks, and for criminal penalties for adults whose firearms wind up being used by children in violence acts.

I forget if you have addressed yourself to those issues before. If you have not, could you do so? What do you think about those? And if any of your guests have any thoughts on the usefulness of those things, I would be interested.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: What we are trying to do is make sure that penalties are increased for juvenile possession of guns and for adults who transfer guns to juveniles. We are seeking funding aimed at preventing juveniles from getting guns and for programs such as this, and funding for innovative court programs that would focus on the issue of juveniles and guns.

QUESTION: So, you would support those measures in Congressman -- (off microphone) -- efforts and those by Congressman Schumer, and others?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Let me get the specific language and have Bert confirm for you. Because there are so many pieces floating around, I want to make sure that we are okay.

Yes?

QUESTION: Speaking of conflict resolution, the Mexican Government is very upset over Operation Casablanca. They are upset that they were not consulted. They think some Customs officials involved need to be extradited. What is your reaction to that? Do you think U.S. agents acted improperly? Why wasn't Mexico consulted? Is there no trust for the Mexican Government?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: As Secretary Ruben and Under Secretary Kelley made clear, the undercover agents were working on this investigation at great, great personal risk, up to and including the very day of the arrest. And the security of the agents required that the investigation be very closely held even within law enforcement in this country.

Again, though, as I mentioned last week, I think there has been cooperation. The Mexican Government has made arrests as a follow-up to this. And I look forward to continued efforts aimed at money-laundering here in the United States.

QUESTION: On the extradition of U.S. officials, or the threat of extraditing U.S. officials do you think it is a credible threat? Did we act properly in that?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I do not do "what ifs." But I know that some very dedicated law enforcement agents spent a great deal of time trying to bring to justice people who perpetuate drug trafficking.

QUESTION: Ms. Green, the Secretary of State -- the Exterior Minister of Mexico, Ms. Greene, said that this was a very strong blow to bi-national cooperation, and especially in drugs, said that the U.S. agents obviously broke Mexican laws, and that this would all have to be negotiated and could very seriously affect the cooperation between Mexico and the United States. Have you any reaction to Ms. Greene?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I think we must all do everything that we can to focus on drug trafficking and the damage it is doing to both nations, and to take the appropriate steps, based on our laws, that will bring these people to justice. I think the Mexican Government has followed through in this effort. I know they are trying to implement their money-laundering law. And I think we can continue to see that people who violate our laws are brought to justice.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, a quick question on privilege. First, will you be appealing the District Judge's order -- ruling on the Secret Service privilege?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: We are reviewing that now.

QUESTION: When do you intend to make your decision?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Shortly.

QUESTION: And with respect to her ruling on executive privilege, it turns out that you entered into the case -- unbeknownst to us until very recently -- and asked her to find that there was a qualified privilege, to use a balancing test, which she basically seems to have done. Are you satisfied with her ruling on executive privilege?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Our comments will be made in court.

QUESTION: So, you may be appealing her ruling?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Our comments will be made in court if they are made.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, could you explain, though, why in that case the Justice Department took a view that is different from the White House? They argued for an absolute privilege and the Justice Department argued for a qualified privilege.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: It is important that the Department of Justice reflect the

institutional issues that the Department has with respect to major issues like executive privilege. And this was our position.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, yesterday, at a forum on youth violence at the University of Maryland, a Harvard epidemiologist said she sees us now into a second wave of youth violence -- the first in the late-eighties, into the nineties, inner cities, blacks mostly; now it is suburban, rural and society in general she says seem to be curiously interested now -- I mean, why -- do you see this evolution? Because it is now happening in areas where whites prevail and they cannot quite fathom it?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I have not seen her study, but I will tell you that in the experience I have had in the last 5 years, rural and less urban communities reminded me again and again that the problem of youth violence has not been one just seen in urban areas. It is a problem that we have got to deal with.

And what is so important is that we should deal with it in a thoughtful and bipartisan way. We should get the best minds looking at the facts, trying to reach the appropriate decisions. And, to date, all the factors and all the evaluations indicate to me that what we need to do is to develop a comprehensive prevention effort that gives young people a real opportunity, with the skills such as they are learning in conflict resolution, through mentoring programs, through truancy prevention programs that keep them in school, give them a chance to really grow in a strong and positive way.

I think it is important that we have intervention programs, so that the first-offender, who is charged with possession of a gun, is not just let back to the streets without appropriate intervention, such as we have heard about here today; and that for those who continue to commit crime or commit serious crime, they have got to know that they face a very certain and very firm consequence that fits the crime.

So much of it is going to involve communities and how they develop these comprehensive programs. Because a good prevention program will not work unless there is a program to hold people accountable. And chiefs of police across the country have indicated that detaining them will not be the answer either. We have got to use common sense and we have got to figure out what works. We have got to look at evaluations, and we have got to build from that.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, I take it that the OPR review of Judge Starr's investigation is still pending Judge Johnson's rulings on the 6(e) motions and the other motions that are before her?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: That is as I understand it.

QUESTION: Earlier this week, a number of celebrities and defense attorneys got together in New York City, and called on the Justice Department and yourself to look into the civil rights abuses in Wenatchee. How is that coming along? I know that you guys have --

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I have not seen their letter yet. But what we have indicated is -- in the past with respect to the Wenatchee case -- is that we do not have general supervisory jurisdiction over State court proceedings. There can be certain extreme cases where we might have jurisdiction, and we will continue to review all the new information we receive, to see whether there is any basis for jurisdiction for the Department to review the matter.

Pete, you had a question.

QUESTION: Speaking of letters, have you gotten a letter from four of your previous predecessors -- that was smart --

(Laughter.)

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I am glad you said that.

QUESTION: -- on whether the Department should appeal the Secret Service ruling?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I understand that we have not received a letter from my four predecessors -- or four of my predecessors, but that we have received a letter from a professor, stating that he represents them. I have not seen the letter yet.

QUESTION: There is an article today about secret evidence that Mr. Starr has shown to Judge Johnson, that pertains to White House persons needed to testify. Have you asked for or have you received any offer of seeing that evidence?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I have tried to do everything I could to ensure the independence of the investigation and have not discussed it.

QUESTION: That would not concern you, then?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I have not discussed it with Mr. Starr. And as you know, I have tried very hard to make sure that we do not do anything that interferes with his investigation.

QUESTION: Given that position, Ms. Reno, can you talk a little bit more about why the Justice Department decided to enter the privilege discussions?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: There are institutional issues that are at stake in terms of the Department's position with respect to executive privilege that apply only to the law, and do not go to the issues at hand. And it is important that the Department's institutional position that has evolved over time, with the development through career lawyers of the Department's point of view, I think be made known to the court in those situations.

QUESTION: Can you tell us whether the FBI investigation in Miami about the INS raid, whether that has been concluded, whether it is anywhere near conclusion?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: My understanding is that it is still pending.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, a few weeks ago Judge Starr requested a face-to-face meeting with you to resolve how the allegations against David Hale, in Arkansas, would be resolved, or would be investigated. Have you had that face-to-face meeting? And have you and the OIC worked out an alternative mechanism to investigate those allegations?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I think, again, it would be appropriate, so that I do not do anything that affects his investigation, that any comment be made by Mr. Starr.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, back to the youth violence issue for a moment. The President, as you know, asked that you convene a group of experts on this issue. And I gather they have met at least once. What do you see as their role in this process? Will they make recommendations to the Department? What are they doing?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: We have met with them twice now. And they are making recommendations. They have had some very thoughtful comments. And at this point, we are trying to determine how we can best use their precious time to address the issues and to develop a plan of action that is a real and concrete effort.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, have you any idea of how other countries deal with this? Because I know the United States is so much more violent than other industrialized countries. Have you ever taken a look at, sort of, say, in Britain or Japan and other places, where the violence is so much lower?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I had the opportunity to attend a conference on the issue, and addressing the issue, in England in December of 1996, as I recall. What is clear is that we have got more of a problem with respect to youth violence than many of our other European and counterparts in Canada. And we can give them warnings of what is to come. They remind us, again, of the problems we face with guns in the hands of young people.

And I think, generally, there are specific programs that we hear about that we try to improve on. One of the most interesting efforts I have heard about was from a Canadian

expert, talking about the sentencing circles in the Native American tribes in Canada, and the fact that they do not find blame when they are sitting, trying to figure out what to do with a young person. They try to figure out what caused the problem in the first place and do something to solve it, to break the cycle that is causing the crime.

As they point out, they are trying to heal rather than to blame. And there is some measure -- I think we have got to hold our young people accountable, but I think we have got to address what causes the problem in the first place.

Thank you very much.

Would you all be willing to stay and answer any questions?

MS. BAKER: Yes.

MR. WEBB: Yes. Take care, ma'am.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Thank you.

(Whereupon, at 10:08 a.m., the Attorney General's portion of the press conference concluded.)

QUESTION: Can you clarify for us what the gun charge is here? Is it possession? Is it use of a gun in the commission of a felony, armed robbery, any crime involving a gun? Or is it just possession?

MR. WEBB: Any crime involved with a gun, possession being the minimum, and any other crime of violence that would be a higher charge.

QUESTION: And if I may ask another question, every State and the District of Columbia has its own laws, and there is also a Federal Gun-Free Schools Act that says that if you bring a gun to school, the school must expel you. But, also, bringing a gun to school is of course a Federal crime.

In the District of Columbia, if a young person brings a gun to school, are they charged with a crime? And would that enter them into your program, as well?

MR. WEBB: Yes. They would be expelled from school, and then they would have to go through an alternative education source. And then they would be entered in our program.

MS. BAKER: Let me just clarify that the young people, predominantly, who are referred

to this program are young people who possess but have not yet used. There are some who have used a weapon, but primarily it is young people who have been determined by the court to be able to benefit from this. And most of those young people have not used the weapon, but some have.

QUESTION: Does anyone who spends time in jail go through this program?

MS. BAKER: Well, they are separate proceedings. This is a pre-adjudication process, pending the disposition. The disposition could be jail. The disposition could be dismissal of the case. It could be a range of options.

MR. O'BRIEN: But if they succeed at the program, then the charges would be dropped. So, this is really, you know, a chance to get them out of the system if they succeed.

QUESTION: What does that involve?

MR. O'BRIEN: To attend the classes, participate, clearly, you know, benefit. There are also some tests taken. We have shown an increase in knowledge about the law is one of the other factors that was looked at in the evaluation. But attendance is the key, and participation and --

QUESTION: How many hours a day?

MS. BAKER: It is 16 classes, 2 hours a week.

MR. O'BRIEN: Thirty-two hours.

MS. BAKER: So 32 hours.

QUESTION: And can you give us an example of a situation you have described -- well, how do they resolve the conflict? What is an example of how you tell the kid to avoid pulling out the gun or taking it in the first place?

MS. BAKER: Well, our classic -- you know, bumped in a hallway or bumped on the street -- I mean, those are the kinds of situations that escalate. So, you use that as the scenario. And you have the kids role-play. Now, first of all, understanding what was their reaction, understanding what are the forces that could make that situation escalate. And they do it in the context of a role-play, which is safe.

So, you are not out on the street testing this, you are in the context of a classroom, in a role-play, where you have got individuals there to help you think, okay, well, what happened, how did I feel, what could I have done, let me analyze what my options were, what would

happen if I walked away, or said, "See you later, got to go, or if I said, "Sorry, I bumped you."

So, in a protected environment, they learn to analyze the forces that could cause the conflict to escalate, to think through what actions they could take -- communications, body language, whatever works for them -- that would help diffuse that situation.

QUESTION: Is there a dropout rate?

MS. BAKER: From this program?

QUESTION: Yes.

MR. WEBB: Yes.

MS. BAKER: Yes, let me clarify that. There is a dropout rate. About half the kids actually end up going through a majority of the classes. And that is because -- as I said, this is pre-adjudication -- so these young people are in the program while their case is pending. If their case gets thrown out, they may not come back to the class. They do not have to come back to the class. If they get incarcerated, they do not come back to the class.

So, there is a large attrition rate. And this is actually why we suspect, if we could take this methodology of integrating -- teaching about the law and teaching about conflict resolution into other settings -- for example, alternative schools, where there is more -- so that it is embedded in the ongoing, you know, classroom activities, we think there would be, obviously, less attrition, and we think perhaps even more of a success rate.

QUESTION: Why do you think -- the 90 percent figure for -- 90 percent less likely to be rearrested on a gun charge is phenomenal -- why do you think two-thirds of the graduates of your program, if I may, are nonetheless rearrested on other crimes?

MR. O'BRIEN: Well, I think the focus of this program, you know, for 32 hours -- not every hour of it, but the majority of it -- is looking at the issue of violence and guns, and then dealing with that. So, if we had a longer program -- and we do out in the schools, our Street Law programs around the country do focus on lots of areas of law and crime, and not just criminal law, as well -- but I think that the main thing we are doing here is really getting them to stop and think. It is not telling them what to do in a situation at all. It is getting them, through discussions and the role-plays and the classes, to really focus on themselves.

There is a nice quote in the article about -- I hope you all get the handout that we have -- from the kid who says: They deal with real, day-to-day problems in these classes. You learn about it so you can use it. There is no purpose in getting arrested or killed for nonsense. If you really respect yourself, then you are not going to get into trouble, like a hoodlum.

It is thinking. This is what we do not have. And many young people -- we all know, many of us have teenagers -- they often do not think before they act, right?

QUESTION: So are you saying that the school system is amenable to what you mentioned, of doing this, or is there a turf problem here?

MR. O'BRIEN: I do not know. What do you mean by a turf problem?

QUESTION: That you are taking over the teacher's --

MR. O'BRIEN: We have been working to spread the teaching of law in schools now for about 20 years. And there is always an issue of time. But I think the one good thing that may come out of the terrible tragedies that we have seen around the country is I think schools might be willing right now to begin to focus on giving up some time to really solve what could be a terrible tragedy and prevent it.

And so we will try to push on that. And this is a big push here, getting the Attorney General to endorse it, and perhaps schools around the country can focus on this. And they can contact us, and we would like to see how we might spread this to schools, community settings, alternative schools, suspension programs, any of these things, rather than just having kids sit. This is a chance to have them really change.

MS. BAKER: The other lessons learned here is the value of getting the conflict resolution in the ongoing relevant educational experience. So, if teachers are teaching English, that are teaching history, embedding the conflict resolution in the lesson that is currently before the young people is also a way to engage them around it, in a way that is relevant to their current educational experience. And it does not take away from the teaching experience, but in fact adds to it.

QUESTION: It is illegal to possess a handgun if you under 21, in terms of a long gun 18, it is basically illegal to own at all in the District of Columbia, where are these kids getting these guns?

MR. WEBB: Well, guns, generally, in the City, a lot of them are being housed in the suburbs and are being burglarized, some straw purchases from illegal sales in the City.

QUESTION: Detective Webb, were you called upon to shelter, to aid, to come in, to intercede for those youths who might be threatened by pushers, bullies?

MR. WEBB: Well, I had a case recently of a young man -- this happened yesterday as a matter of fact -- who was threatened by bullies and he knew where a gun was. And he came

and got me and said, Detective Webb, I know where there is a gun. It is not mine, but I really feel I need this, because I am in fear of what might happen to me because these bullies want to hurt me over something that was really trivial.

I said, well, tell me where the weapon is and we will get the weapon, and then we will talk. And that is what we did. We recovered the weapon and we talked. And everything worked out.

QUESTION: But do you shield them when you find yourself in that position?

MR. WEBB: No, only if the person who is bullying him is actually breaking the law, then I will step in.

QUESTION: What if someone is walking down the street and is jumped by someone who does have a gun; what does he do in that situation? It is scary enough when somebody does not have a gun, but --

MR. WEBB: Right. Well, the main thing is avoiding this. He is going to try to avoid the conflict instead of to interact with force, with his own weapon. If he can just avoid the whole situation, and contact someone who he trusts in law enforcement, like myself or someone else that he can trust, then we will try to help him out. But, right at that moment, if he is caught with someone with a weapon and he does not have one, then, God bless him, I do not know what is going to happen in this.

MS. BAKER: One of the things that is covered in the curriculum is five different approaches to conflict. You can avoid, you can accommodate, you can be competitive, you can compromise, you can collaborate. And there is no right answer. And every situation will demand a different response.

And it may well be -- and we teach that in certain situations the best thing to do is to avoid.

MR. WEBB: To run if necessary.

MS. BAKER: So, this is not, you know -- no matter what the situation is, sit down and talk about it. There are quite a few situations where you are going to want to avoid it.

I can also address the issue about why there is disparity in the weapons rearrests. One of the lessons is myths about guns. For example, you know, true or false, most guns are bought through pawnshop. False. You get it from a friend.

Another myth, there are the same Federal safety regulations for gun manufacturers as

there are for the manufacture of teddy bears. False, no, there are not safety regulations that gun manufacturers have to adhere to.

The kids do not understand this -- they understand that the environment around guns and the whole issue around gun control and the legislation of guns -- so that they have a different appreciation for it.

QUESTION: Do you know of any cases where a kid goes to classes -- and goes back -- or drops out and just you later here that they used guns or something like that?

MS. BAKER: I did not hear of any such cases.

MR. O'BRIEN: Well, let me add that we are not saying that it does not happen, but we just don't know of any.

MS. BAKER: I have heard of the alternative. I have heard of a young man who had been bullied because he wanted to go class. He wanted to go to graduation. He was being bullied, you know, why are you going to do this? And really harassed about going. And he went.

MR. O'BRIEN: This is something that is really interesting about these classes. These are kids who, for the most part, have not succeeded very well in school. They come every Saturday morning to the courthouse and attend these classes, first, very skeptical, got a lot of negative body language, et cetera. But they are very quickly bought in to a whole different style of teaching, a whole different style of caring and relevance to their lives. They really see this as beneficial to them by the second or third class and have a very different educational experience than perhaps they have ever had before.

One thing we wanted to mention is we would invite any of you, if you want to come up afterwards, if you would like to come see a class, it is held right in the Superior Court Courthouse, in the jury lounge, every Saturday morning for a couple of hours. And we can arrange that. And I would be happy to do that.

MS. BAKER: You might be able to participate in a role-play.

MR. O'BRIEN: That is right. You might not be able to be -- (off microphone) --

QUESTION: (Off microphone) -- skeptical kids; is that what sort of wins them over, that you do not just sit there and lecture to them?

MR. WEBB: They feel part of the -- (off microphone) --

MR. O'BRIEN: Exactly. They are not talked at.

MR. WEBB: They are not talked at. They feel part of it. They enjoy it. They actually begin to enjoy themselves.

MS. BAKER: Yes. In the exit interviews with the kids, they comment on that. I mean, they comment on it is a different teaching style than they have encountered before.

VOICE: Thank you all very much.

MS. BAKER: Thank you.

MR. O'BRIEN: Thank you.

MR. WEBB: Thank you.

(Whereupon, at 10:20 a.m., the press conference concluded.)