



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

ADDRESS TO THE UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF MAYORS

ATTORNEY GENERAL JANET RENO

JANUARY 29, 1999

Capitol Hilton Hotel

1001 16th Street, N.W.

Washington, D.C.

A D D R E S S

(12:50 p.m.)

GENERAL RENO: Thank you, Mayor. I should be applauding you all, because I have had the opportunity to see so many of you in action on the streets of your cities and in your communities, and you're showing that Government works.

The Salt Lake City Conference in September was one of the most exciting things that have happened to me since I became Attorney General. There was an energy in the room. There was no longer just a discussion of plans and what you were going to do, it was a discussion of what you had done, the fact that it was working and the fact that it was making a difference.

You sent me back to Washington with more energy, more resolve, and I just think it is contagious. I had an opportunity that day also to meet with some high school students whom the mayor had invited to participate. They said, why don't you come out to our high school and listen to us, and I said, I'll come back as soon as I can, and I was back not too long thereafter and went to the high school for two

sessions.

The energy in that room, the commitment, the dedication of those young people made me realize all over again what we are fighting for and what a tremendous resource we have, but that day I saw a community action group in action. I saw a domestic violence program working.

And I was so impressed by the fact that you had released your Best Practices Manual, which the COPS program had funded. You were at the formulation stage for your national action plan. It is a true blueprint. I wish I could stand up here and tell you that I could deliver the 100,000 youth counselors, but we still can work at it and figure out how we do it, if we don't do it one way, how we do it another.

Because of so many of you, because of so many people in this country, crime is down 6-1/2 years in a row. It was wonderful for me at the White House this morning to hear from mayors talk about 40 percent reductions in homicide rates, talk about the excitement they had about what was happening in their community. It was wonderful to see the pins.

But we have a deeper, more difficult question to ask: why has this happened? We've got to be honest with ourselves. Is it just a fluctuation? Is it a blip? I don't care what it is, we've got to capitalize on it.

We cannot become complacent. We have got to continue to do and work together to achieve further results, because I'm convinced, and you have proven this to me in your communities, that if we work together, if we keep the pressure on with respect to guns, if we increase the support for our community policing across this land, if we build better domestic violence programs, if we give our children a strong and positive future, we can have a tremendous lasting impact on the culture of violence in this country. We do not have to be as violent a Nation as we have been and as we are.

(Applause.)

GENERAL RENO: I was in Toronto for a meeting last August, and that city from 1992 to 1996, there were 100 gun homicides. In a city of

equal size in the United States, there were 3,063 gun homicides in the same period, just across the border.

We do not have to perpetuate this culture of violence. We can make a difference, but how?

At the table outside the room there is something that I've put together called planning for Strong and Healthy Children. It's my jottings and notes from visiting so many of your cities, so many of the programs.

What are the pieces that go together to build strong and healthy children? It's not an easy task. It is not a task that you do overnight, but this gives you some of the ideas, ideas you have given me, and as I travel the Nation I see the programs that are working and I think, how can I exchange it?

How can I take the domestic violence program that Mayor Corradini introduced me to, and show it to all of you? How can you hear from the police officers themselves, from the advocates, from the counselors, from the people who make a difference, and how can we transport that energy of Salt Lake City to other communities?

How can I let you all know today the strength that I felt in San Diego as the community announced a comprehensive communities program, and where I could see the difference it was beginning to make?

I would like to suggest to you that we work together to integrate our Web site so that any person with access to the Internet can obtain and exchange information about what works, what grants might be available with respect to it, who you should call if you want information with respect to the program, how it was started, how it was funded, what are the problems you see with the program?

I want to start using the video and audio capabilities of the Internet to the fullest extent possible. I want to replicate the site, for example, at Salt Lake City. I would love to take a videotape of that session and use some of the editing magic so that we can provide a clip right on the linked Web site so that others across the country not only can read about your programs but see it in action, and understand the human qualities of it.

Now, I have learned full force in the Justice Department that video is new, that it can be confusing, and that it can be time-consuming. I am not suggesting that we can do this easily overnight, but I am suggesting that there is a brass ring on which we can grab, and that the ring is swinging past us now.

We can do other things. I would love to go back to East Bay, to the corridor there, to hear from mayors and police chiefs and prosecutors, but when I look at this vast land I am not sure when I am going to be able to go back there and hear for three or four hours one afternoon what we as a Federal Government can do to improve our support and assistance with you.

But what if we do a video conferencing program and hear directly from people about what we can do to make things work better at the Department of Justice, how we can work with other Federal agencies to be supportive of your efforts.

This is a challenge for the 21st Century, and it's one I would like to help perfect. You've shown that you can make things happen. We have got to make sure that every city, large and small, every rural area, sees the magic of what you have done in your communities.

A new millennium is approaching. Let us take the tools, the building blocks, the pieces of families and children's lives, and let us create structures within our community and within our Nation that can give our children a strong and positive future.

We have accomplished, working together, so very much. We can do so much more if we take the tools we've gathered and forged them into one whole, communities that care, communities that want to help but want to hold people accountable, and communities that have a can-do attitude, like so many people in this room.

All I can tell you is, you have proven to everybody that Government works. You have proven to everybody that crime does not have to be at the high levels it has been for so long. You are my heroes and my heroines, and I cannot thank you enough.

(Applause.)

(Whereupon, the address ended at 12:50 p.m.)