NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON

SPEAKER

U.S. ATTORNEY GENERAL JANET RENO

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB BALLROOM

THURSDAY,APRIL 15, 1999

1:01 P.M. EDT

LARRY LIPMAN (NPC president): Good afternoon. Welcome to the National Press Club.

My name is Larry Lipman. I am the president of the National Press Club and Washington bureau chief of the Palm Beach Post in the Cox Washington bureau.

I would like to welcome club members and their guests to the audience today, as well as those of you watching on C-SPAN or listening to this program on National Public Radio.

Before introducing our head table, I would like to remind our members of some upcoming speakers. On Tuesday, April 20th, Meg Whitman, president and CEO of the Internet auction company eBay, will discuss a new economy for a new century.

On Monday, April 26th, we will hear from Dr. Javier Solana, secretary general of NATO. And on Tuesday, April 27th, Peace Corps Director Mark Gearan and AmeriCorps Director Harris Wofford will discuss the Peace Corps and AmeriCorps in the 21st century.

Press Club members may access transcripts and audio files of our luncheons at our web site, npc.press.org. Nonmembers may purchase audio and video tapes by calling 1-888-343-1940.

If you have any questions for our speaker -- and I hope you do -- please write them on the cards provided at your table and pass them up to me, and I will ask as many as time permits.

I'd now like to introduce our head table guests and ask them to stand briefly while their names are called. Please hold your applause until all the head table guests have been introduced.

From your right, David Jackson, Dallas Morning News; Marie Cocco, Newsday; Lisa Zagaroli, Detroit News; Donna Leinwand, Knight-Ridder Newspapers; Susan Garland, Businessweek Magazine; Ray Fisher, associate attorney general of the United States and guest of our speaker; Bill Lann Lee, acting assistant attorney general for civil rights and guest of our speaker; Ken Eskey, the chairman of the speakers committee; skipping the speaker, Mark Johnson, Media General News Service and the speakers committee member responsible for organizing today's lunch; Larry Bivins, Gannett News Service; Linda Kramer, People Magazine; Naftali Bendavid, Chicago Tribune; Jennifer Maddox, Scripps-Howard News Service; and Tony Mauro, USA Today. (Applause.)

Our speaker today, Attorney General Janet Reno, should be welcome in the halls of the National Press Club, if only by genetics. She is the daughter of Henry Reno, a legendary police reporter for the Miami Herald and Jane Wood Reno of the late lamented Miami News. And her grandfather was the chief photographer at the Herald and her aunt was the music and art critic for the Herald. The couple even met at a newspaper. The attorney general's brother Robert writes a syndicated column for Newsday.

Perhaps Janet Reno would also have joined the ranks of the fourth estate if not for the career guidance her mother

offered in typical blunt fashion. Janet could not be a journalist, her mother said, because she dangles her participles. (Laughter.)

Instead, she headed off to study chemistry at Cornell University and law at Harvard. She worked as a lawyer and prosecutor in her home town of Miami and was Dade County state attorney when President Clinton nominated her as attorney general in 1993. In January she became the second longest-serving attorney general in the history of the United States.

It's been a good time to run the Justice Department, with five straight years of decline in national crime statistics. But now that we're not so worried about crime, we have grown worried about those who fight it. A series of police misconduct allegations has arisen in a variety of cities, most notably the recent murder charges against three New York police officers for shooting an unarmed immigrant.

Today, civil rights groups are staging a massive protest march in New York.

Here to talk about this tense moment in the relationship between communities and the police is the top law enforcement officer in the nation, but also the person whose department is charged with protecting the civil rights of all Americans.

Ladies and gentlemen, let's give a warm National Press Club welcome to Attorney General Janet Reno. (Applause.)

ATTY GEN. RENO: Good afternoon, and thank you for having me.

Across the country communities are considering the ways in which police officers do their jobs, how they handle deadly confrontations and how they protect and respect the people they serve.

Police officers have one of the hardest jobs there is. A

police officer is charged with ensuring public safety, but she or he is also empowered to use force and, if necessary, to take a life to protect others from death or great bodily harm. The police are there to protect us from crime, but they must protect our rights at the same time. And to do their work effectively, the police must have the trust and confidence of the communities they serve. They must develop a partnership and a relationship with the citizens they protect.

Professional, sensitive, and dedicated police officers have done so much across this country to make their community a far better place to live. In many communities police and citizens are working together to prevent crime and to build understanding and to bring people together.

The crime rate has fallen every year for the past six years in virtually every category. Policing has contributed to that drop. The thousands of community-oriented police officers who are on the streets, due to the president's COPS initiative, have made a difference. All across America neighborhoods are safer.

But some people, especially those in minority communities, are wondering whether our success in reducing crime has been due in part to overly aggressive police officers who ignore the civil liberties of Americans. That concern has escalated and shown a more public face following the tragic shooting death of Amadou Diallo in New York two months ago.

This nation's heart goes out to the family and friends of Mr. Diallo for their terrible loss. The case is now with the courts to decide, and it would be inappropriate for me to comment.

But the issue is not just one city. The issue is national in scope and reaches people all across this country. For too many people, especially in minority communities, the trust that is so essential to effective policing does not exist because residents believe that police have used excessive force, that law enforcement is too aggressive, that law enforcement is biased, disrespectful, and unfair.

Too often I have heard stories similar to the following account. A black man is driving down the road. He is coming back from the store, or returning home from work. A siren sounds, the lights start to flash. And in his rearview mirror he sees a police car. He pulls over. The officer comes up besides the car and asks for identification. He hands it over. The police officer asks questions, and then hands the license back, telling him without further explanation to drive on. The driver is left with unspoken questions. Why did he pull me over? Is because I am black? Is it because I am driving a nice car? Is it because people like me aren't often found in this part of town? The driver may never learn the answers. But he is left with a clear perception, the perception that he was being pulled over for being black.

But, indeed, the officer may have had a good reason to make that stop. Perhaps the vehicle was speeding. Perhaps the officer was searching for a man who was driving a car identical to the one belonging to the driver. The driver's perception may be completely wrong. But if the driver is never told why he was pulled over, he has no reason to change that perception. And as he drives away, it is not just his time he will have lost, but his confidence in law enforcement as well.

Whether these feelings are based on individual experiences or based on the stories and the perceptions of others, what matters most is that these feelings are very real on the part of too many Americans. When even a U.S. attorney who is African American feels he has to instruct his son to be cautious of the police when he drives, we have a problem.

When minority communities, in the wake of a shooting, immediately assume the police officer, not the suspect, is at fault, we have a problem. And the tensions that arise between the police and minority residents have serious consequences both in terms of effective policing and community unrest.

When citizens do not trust their local police officer, they are less willing to report crime and less willing to be

witnesses in criminal cases. When there is a breach of trust, it means people are more distrustful of the police, more tense when there is an encounter, and less likely to cooperate. As a result, police officers are more tense, and they may be more likely to react with more force than necessary. Suddenly, a routine encounter can become a deadly clash.

Since I became attorney general, I have tried to get all parts of our communities to work together to deal with the problem of crime in this country -- state and local law enforcement working together with the federal government identifying a problem and working together to solve it. I've tried to get businesses and clergy, schools and social agencies to come together to the table, because crime is a problem that all of us must work together to solve because no one of us can solve it alone. It is now time for all of us to come together in our communities, with citizens from all parts of the community, to build the trust and confidence of all Americans in law enforcement.

Over the past several weeks, I have met with police chiefs, union representatives, community leaders, with young people at risk, and offenders on probation, listening as they have described the problem and made suggestions -- good, positive, constructive proposals -- that would generate trust and build a solid relationship. Both law enforcement and community leaders understand that we are and that we must continue to be together if we are to solve this problem. There is probably no task more important to safe neighborhoods and civil rights than improving relationships and building greater trust between minority communities and law enforcement.

And every police chief I have talked to and every community leader I have met shares this commitment.

Effective policing does not mean abusive policing. Effective policing does not ignore the constitutional rights and the civil liberties that police officers are sworn to uphold. On the Ninth Street side of the Justice Department building, inscribed across the top, are the words describing the law that we live under. "The common

law is derived from the will of mankind, issuing from the life of the people, framed through mutual confidence, sanctioned by the light of reason." For police officers to be effective, their enforcement of the law must be framed in mutual confidence between the people served and the people who serve them. Every American must respect the law, but the law must respect every American.

Across the country, there are nearly 700,000 law enforcement officers, and the overwhelming majority are hard-working public servants who do a dangerous job justly, fairly, with excellence and with honor. They put their lives on the line every day in the pursuit of justice and public safety, and they do that because they care about the people they are committed to serving.

I support and salute these dedicated officers. We owe them a great debt of gratitude. But we as a society cannot tolerate officers who cross the line and abuse their position by mistreating law-abiding citizens or who bring their own racial bias to the job of policing. No person should be subject to unreasonable force. No person should be targeted by law enforcement based on the color of his or her skin. Equal justice under law must mean the same thing to minority communities as it means to the nation as a whole.

Police chiefs and rank and file officers alike agree. They tell me that if we want to maintain the trust and confidence of the community, we must take decisive action against those few officers who violate their oaths and deny citizens their constitutional rights by the use of excessive force or harassment. Police organizations, such as the International Association of Chiefs of Police, and then the Police Executive Research Forum, have stated very clearly that police activity that is race or ethnic-based is neither legal, consistent with democratic ideals and principles of American policing, nor in any way legitimate and defensible as a strategy for public protection. Indeed, last Friday, representatives of Oregon and Washington state law enforcement agencies and police unions signed an unprecedented resolution condemning race-based profiling, that was facilitated by the Community Relations Service of

the Justice Department.

Today I am announcing that I will be convening law enforcement leaders, community representatives, including young people, who must be heard from, civil rights advocates and experts in police practices to identify and share strategies that are working and to understand suggestions that can be implemented to address this issue.

I will also be reviewing the suggestions that I have been provided by civil rights leaders and law enforcement officials with whom I have met.

Last week the Police Executive Research Forum brought 20 police chiefs from around the country to Washington. The chiefs were asked to bring one or two community leaders from their cities, so they could discuss the issues surrounding police misconduct. That was an excellent discussion, and very constructive.

Today I would like to focus on five areas that I think will form the foundation of our efforts to foster police integrity and eliminate police misconduct.

The first step is to expand and to promote the kind of partnership and dialogue which develops the mutual trust and confidence between police and the people they serve.

The concept of community policing can teach us a great deal, for it seeks to improve public safety by involving the community itself and the people themselves in establishing police priorities and involving police officers in the communities they serve. It involves partnerships between the police and institutions, such as the school and the clergy. In cities across this country, officers organize and participate in community activities and develop ways for the community to participate in police decision-making.

By breaking down suspicions, building up the trust, the community-oriented police officer becomes the peacemaker and the problem-solver without relinquishing his or her

enforcement duties.

Sometimes it just boils down to taking the time to learn how to talk to each other. In Winston-Salem, the police department has housed its basic law enforcement training program at a school for at- risk youth. As part of that basic law enforcement training, these police trainees were working as mentors with young people in the school. I was there last week, and I talked to trainees and youth together.

One teenager was very eloquent. "I didn't like the police. I didn't trust them. I used to walk away from them when I saw them coming. When they first came to the school and started talking to me, I didn't listen to them. They kept talking to me, and I started hearing and started listening, and they really had something to say."

Those trainees and those young people, sitting together, were learning how to talk to each other, and in the limited time they had had, they were each learning from the other. It was one of the best experiences I have seen in terms of seeing police and young people relate together.

In Baltimore, police officers are working together with community service officers and parents and community volunteers to build trust and mutual respect between young people and adult authority figures. The Police Athletic League operates 27 centers around Baltimore, serving the needs of more than 7,000 youths by creating safe havens that are open after school until 10:00 p.m. at night. Unsurprisingly, in neighborhoods where Police Athletic League centers are located, crime involving young people has dropped dramatically.

And police departments can also find valuable partners in the faith community. In Boston, a group of ministers, the 10 Point Coalition, has played a vital role in the city's recent and remarkably successful fight against violent crime. The coalition's outreach and work with at-risk youth was vital. Even more critical, however, was the coalition's effort to change the way the police in Boston's inner- city

community relate to each other. The coalition created a balance between the community's desire for safe streets and the community's reluctance to see their children put in jail. In this way, the coalition served as a bridge of trust and reconciliation between the community and the police.

Last month President Clinton announced that we will expand the creation of Citizen Police Academies. These academies, in intensive discussion over many weeks, explain clearly and honestly just what the police do and how they operate. These center demystify the police and enable citizens to better understand the challenges that police officers face day in and day out.

Our second undertaking is this: We must insist on police accountability. And I begin with the Department of Justice. We are conducting a self-assessment of our own use of force and civil rights processes, coordinated by the inspector general, to ensure that we have procedures in place which hold us accountable to the American people, to all of the American people.

All law enforcement agencies -- federal, state and local -- from the director, chief or sheriff on down must end a clear message that misconduct will not be tolerated, rude or unfair treatment will not be countenanced. But this is not a responsibility of management alone, rank and file officers must join together to promote a climate of integrity, civility, accountability and responsibility.

They must be intolerant of misconduct by fellow officers, and they must make it unacceptable to keep silent about other officers' misconduct.

Every law-enforcement agency should have a complaint process so people can file complaints without fear. If individuals fear retaliation, then they won't file complaints, and the agency will never know that it has a problem on its hands. Some police departments have moved their Internal Affairs unit to a separate building so that individuals do not have to worry about coming face to face

with the officer they are complaining about. Other departments have set up a phone-in reporting process or distribute brochures on how to file a complaint.

Every police department should make sure that it has in place a vigorous system for investigating allegations of misconduct thoroughly and fairly. A fair system ensures due process both for the officer and for those filing complaints. Departments must ensure that there is sufficient funding and staffing to pursue each complaint so citizens see that they have not been ignored. Agencies must have the will to swiftly discipline officers or agents when a complaint has been sustained. If they do not, some will think that they can cross the line with impunity.

Police departments should also know, when officers use force, why the force was used and whether it was appropriate. Police officers can implement what are known as early-warning systems to help identify officers who may need more training or reassignment, if necessary.

Finally, police officers need ways to get an independent view of their performance. In Washington, the police chief asked the Justice Department to come in and review its use of force. The Los Angeles Police Department, as a result of the Christopher Commission reforms, created an inspector general for the department. As a result of a similar commission, the L.A. Sheriff's Office now has an outside monitor.

Third, we need to ensure that police departments recruit officers who reflect the communities they serve, who have high standards and who are then properly trained to deal with the stresses and the dangers of police work. In years past, too many departments had few, if any, minority officers. That has improved significantly. We now have, not just men in blue, but women in blue; not just whites, but people of all colors.

When someone who grows up in the neighborhood becomes an officer there, they understand the people, and they know the languages spoken.

They are men and women our youth can look up to as role models. Old stereotypes and prejudices are not as likely to be passed on to the next generation of police departments if those departments represent a diverse mix of society.

I'm proud of this progress, but we need to do more. The San Antonio police department cadet program targets neighborhoods for recruits where they receive citizen complaints about the police. They attend community meetings and ask community leaders to identify candidates for the cadet program. The department works with those candidates by providing them mentors to help them prepare for the selection process.

We must also emphasize fairness and integrity in our recruitment. As Tom Frazier (sp), the chief of Baltimore's police department puts it, we must recruit those who come to policing in the spirit of service, not in the spirit of adventure. Having recruited the right officers, we must then do a better job of training them. They must know when it is appropriate to use force and when other non-forceful means will do. They must know how to serve all the people.

The job of a police officer is very difficult. Try for a moment to picture it from the officer's perspective. You've just received a call about a drugstore that was robbed. The suspects are two teenagers. You happen to be in the area. You see two youths walking briskly down the street. You yell out to them and suddenly they start to run. You give chase, they split up, you focus on one of the two, letting the other go. You follow him into an alley in a high-crime neighborhood.

All of a sudden, you realize he's trapped. You yell out that you're police and you order him to put his hands in the air. But instead, the panicked youth suddenly swirls around holding a tiny, shiny object that appears to be a gun. Equally panicked, you pull out your gun and without time to reflect, pull the trigger.

Was it a gun? Why did the suspect run? Did your shots hit the youth? Was he, in fact, the robber? Were you right to

pursue him in the first place? We don't know the answers to this hypothetical question, but the most relevant question may be, however, whether you were trained for such an encounter and whether you did everything possible to avoid the use of force.

It is also important that residents realize that police officers in situations like I described are fearful of their own lives. They, too, fear the unpredictable nature of crime and violence on the street. We need to deal with these fears in trying to prevent excessive force incidents.

Over the last decade, 688 law enforcement officers were killed in the line of duty, 633 with firearms. We need to develop strategies to address these fears and deal with some of the stress of police work.

What we cannot do is allow officers' fears to become exaggerated and develop into mistrust of an entire community and suspicions based on stereotypes. In a recent speech, Washington D.C.'s police chief Charles Ramsey noted that those fears are brought on by a narrow view of the world. He says for many police officers, especially those working in high crime areas, their lives have become a good versus a bad guy drama played out in the communities they serve. And these officers see so many of the latter that they lose sight of the former: the good, law-abiding people who make up the vast majority of residents, even in the most crime-infested communities.

This fear among both police officers and community members tends to breed mistrust, which in turn fosters stereotypes, which in turn leads to an exaggerated sense of the differences between our two groups. Thus our training must prepare officers for violent confrontations, but it also must deal with non-deadly confrontations. Officers must know how to interact with citizens, how to use alternatives to force, and that it is wrong to assume that the race or ethnicity of a person determines on which side of the law that person falls.

And most of all, we've got to look at teenagers and

understand that the great, great, great majority, even those who get in trouble, are good kids who want to be somebody and want to make a difference. We've got to learn how to talk to them, learn how to encourage them, and work together to give them a strong and positive future.

Fourth, we must increase our civil rights enforcement. The steps I have outlined so far are things we can do to prevent incidents of police misconduct in the first place. But when they do occur, we must take swift, sure action, and that means prosecution when appropriate.

Most cases of police excessive use of force are prosecuted by state and local authorities. But the Justice Department has a very important role to play. At any given time, the Civil Rights Division and the FBI are investigating several hundred allegations of criminal police misconduct around the country. During the past five years the Justice Department has criminally prosecuted over 200 law enforcement officers for excessive force. We pursue these cases vigorously. But we recognize that the law sets a very high standard of proof. To prove a federal crime, we must prove beyond a reasonable doubt that the officers had the specific intent to use more force than was reasonably necessary under the circumstances, given their training, experience and perceptions.

We need to be successful in another way, too.

We need to do a better job in the Department of Justice of explaining to the public why we are bringing a case or why we can't bring a case, so that both police officers and the members of the community know what to expect from the department while at the same time not doing anything that would affect a pending investigation or pending prosecution. I am resolved to pursue that effort.

In addition to prosecuting individual officers, we also have the authority to sue police departments when we believe there is a pattern of misconduct. Under this authority, known as our Pattern and Practice Authority, we can go to a court to force a police department to change

the way it does business. Using this authority, we are currently investigating several law enforcement agencies across the country. In two instances, we have negotiated agreements with police departments that contain many of the good practices I outlined previously. But as we pursue our Pattern and Practice investigations, we also will be working with departments on preventative measures so that we can address police integrity issues without litigation, where possible.

Fifth and last, we must take steps to gather the data that will help define the scope of the problem and measure our efforts to solve it. Right now we have only anecdotes and allegations. We need more. For the past several years, pursuant to the requirements of the 1994 Crime Control Act, the Department of Justice has tried to develop ways of measuring the level of excessive force incidents. Because police departments often don't keep such records, and because they are not required to report to the federal government statistics on the use of force by officers, we have had only limited success in developing the information.

That's why we're trying a new tack. Every year we conduct a survey of households across the country, asking whether residents have been victims of a crime. The Crime Victimization Survey is perhaps one of the most accurate reflections of law enforcement trends. This year we're going to update the survey to include questions on police misconduct -- questions like, "During the last year, have you had an encounter with the police in which physical force was used?" By doing this, we can get a better sense of the relationship people have with law enforcement and we will know whether the efforts police departments make are succeeding.

I believe data collection in the area of police stops is also very important. By keeping track by race of who is pulled over, why they were stopped, which motorists are subjected to searches and the outcomes of the stops, we can see where the problems exist and how extensive they are. If the numbers show that there is not a problem, then minority communities will have a better outlook on law enforcement

and if the numbers are, in fact, disproportionate, then police departments will be able to study the issue and set out ways to reduce the discrepancy.

Just last month I traveled to San Diego, where I met Chief Saunders (sp) who is developing a program requiring officers on the beat who make stops to put those stops into the computers that they have with them. I watched it in action and it's easily done. It takes very little time and I don't think its disruptive of the officers' day. I think that speaks volumes for what the police can do to identify the scope of the problem and to take steps to correct it.

There is a problem. America is beginning to face it. We must come together and face it as one.

We also know that there are many examples of great policing in the field that can renew the level of trust and confidence in police, in police in young people, and the community they serve. Both sides must continue to reach out, talking to each other.

Together we can and will solve the problem so that police can serve their community with dedication, compassion, understanding and courage. And young people and people who feel like they have been treated unfairly can become a player in the community, a participant in the community and contribute the tremendous energy, the wonderful qualities they have that are often times unnoticed and to such a loss for the whole community.

I have been to too many communities in this country now seeing people come together, work together to make a difference. I am convinced with the resolve that we have used in other situations we can successfully and quickly address this situation. It is a situation that must be solved. (Applause.)

MR. LIPMAN: General, you mentioned the San Diego experience. This question asks about that. Last week you met with 35 police chiefs and activists to discuss the adoption in other cities of San Diego's requirement that

police record the race of people they stop, as you mentioned. What specific plan, if any, resulted from that meeting? Are you advocating that other departments institute a similar plan?

ATTY GEN. RENO: San Diego is more advanced than many departments in its development of automation. This was a hand-held computer that made it very easy for the police to insert the information it took. It seemed like a matter of less than a minute. And so each department will have to grapple with the issue based on its level of automation. But I think it something that we can move to that will not be disruptive of a police officer's day. And I think it can be very helpful.

MR. LIPMAN: You also mentioned keeping track of the traffic statistics. Yesterday Congressman Conyers introduced a bill called The Traffic Stop Statistic Act of 1999, which would require you to study the issue of racial profiling in traffic stops.

Do you support this bill, and will you advocate its passage?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I am reviewing the bill now and considering it in the context of what I learned in San Diego.

I think it is also important that we look to standards for stopping people and see how we can work together to develop standards by which people can judge what they're doing and whether it is in any way selective or if it is consistent with good law enforcement and appropriate civil rights enforcement.

MR. LIPMAN: In light of the recent complaints about misconduct and harassment, do you see the Justice Department becoming more active in studies pursuing patterns-and-practice investigations?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Yes, I do. We will be seeking additional resources to address that area. And under the leadership of Bill Lee, I think we can do so much in identifying problems

up-front and working with police departments who want to do the right thing, in effecting changes that will avoid litigation and will put in place processes and procedures that can, number one, protect against the excessive use of force; but two, processes and procedures that will bring police together with the community, give them the opportunity to learn to talk with each other and to make a difference.

MR. LIPMAN: You mentioned more spending. If police accountability is an administration priority, why is only $1 million, or 2 percent of the president's proposed $50 million budget on policing, being allocated to police accountability projects?

ATTY GEN. RENO: There are so many projects throughout the department in the Office of Justice Programs and COPS Programs that are focused on police accountability and police rapport and relations with the community. And we will continue to seek whatever additional resources are needed as we see where gaps exist and where efforts need to be made that are not being made.

MR. LIPMAN: Would you please comment on the federal program, "Operation Pipeline" and its practice and funding related to "driving while black"?

ATTY GEN. RENO: When I first took office, I heard about profile stops, particularly on major interstate highways. Much of those stops were derived from training procedures developed through Operation Pipeline. I asked for a review of that and was given a presentation by those at DEA responsible for training in Operation Pipeline, and was very impressed by the steps taken and the training process to ensure that there was no one stopped based on racial profiling. It is something that we're continuing to assess as we assess -- do the civil rights assessment for the whole Department of Justice, and it is something that we constantly have to look to.

I think one of the issues I've just alluded to is the development of standards so that we know what's a correct

stop and what's not a correct stop in the variety of situations that an officer addresses.

MR. LIPMAN: We have several questions about profiling, so let's go through some of them: How big a problem do you believe racial profiling is? Is it rare? Is it exaggerated? And is it effective in reducing crime?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Racial profiling is not effective, as far as I am concerned, in reducing crime.

Traffic stops, appropriately done according to standards that ensure there is not racial profiling, can be very effective in drug interdiction, and a great amount of drugs seized in this country are seized as a result of appropriate, lawful stops. What we must do, again, is having training in place and processes in place that avoid it.

I don't -- I can't quantify for you the instances of inappropriate profiling, and I think that's why it's so important that we look the development of data that would help us understand the dimension of the problem. But even before we develop that data, we must ensure that we have processes and procedures in place that enable us to avoid it.

MR. LIPMAN: Following up on that, you talking about standards, should there be a national policy governing traffic stops?

ATTY GEN. RENO: There will be different situations depending on communities. But I think, clearly, standards that apply to different types of situations could be very, very useful to local law enforcement. But I think it has to be standards developed working together in these instances.

Nobody -- I've not met a police officer yet that wants to pick out somebody based on race. They so often tell me, "I was just trying to do my job." We've got to make sure that we provide them with standards that will ensure that they know the best way to do it.

MR. LIPMAN: What is the status of the Justice Department investigation of racial profiling by state troopers in New Jersey?

ATTY GEN. RENO: The last I checked on it, it was still pending, so -- otherwise I can't comment on that. And I see Bill Lee shaking his head "yes".

MR. LIPMAN: Bill asked that question, actually. (Laughter.) Just kidding!

This is a serious question. The very honorable and excellent police officers that you applaud in your remarks are the same ones who refuse to point out, testify against or blow the whistle on known abusive police practices and corrupt officers.

Why can't police, who always oppose civilian review boards, do a better job of ferreting out those bad apples in their midst?

ATTY GEN. RENO: As a prosecutor, I have been there when police officers may not have been as forthcoming as they should. I have also been there where very courageous police officers testified against a colleague. And I think the more we see of those examples, the more we see of the people coming into policing today, the more we will see people who will not tolerate, as I have said we cannot tolerate, amongst our rank and file people who ignore the law, ignore the civil rights of others and engage in any misconduct.

MR. LIPMAN: Several studies have reported that the Justice Department investigates or prosecutes relatively few of the thousands of official misconduct complaints it receives each year. Would you explain the decision-making process in terms of determining what complains merit action?

ATTY GEN. RENO: As I said in my remarks, the standard for federal prosecution of civil rights violation is very high. It has to be an intentional use of excessive force. In many instances, state and local laws provide for a lower

standard for conduct that is not intentional but which might be culpable or reckless. And in those instances, the case will oftentimes be taken into state court. We work with state and local authorities to ensure that justice is done. Sometimes there is a joint investigation and the case will be handled in conversation between the state and federal prosecutors based on what is in the best interest of justice and the best arena to appropriately decide the case in.

I, frankly, think that when state and local officials undertake their responsibility, that it is a great step in the right direction in terms of holding people accountable. That will mean that across this country, we have a network of law enforcement that will not tolerate misconduct.

To give you an example in a situation that did not involve police misconduct, but involves what is to me the partnership that should exist between federal and local officials, I point to the case in Jasper, Texas, where the federal authorities and the FBI assisted the local prosecutor and the local sheriff in the preparation of the case.

It was prosecuted in state court, very ably done, and the fact that the people of Jasper and their criminal justice system, through the conviction, vindicated the rights of a person of that community, I think, speaks volumes and is a very great symbol of the fact that at no level of this country will we tolerate something like that.

MR. LIPMAN: Let me follow up on that investigation question. What would it take to create a federal quick response unit in the Justice Department to respond quickly and efficiently to police incidents?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: Having been a local prosecutor, I can tell you that the federal government has the ability to respond very quickly. The incident happens one day and they're there the next morning.

What we have tried to do in the Department is develop means

of making sure that we have the latest information; that working through the U.S. attorneys, each one of whom has designated an assistant United States attorney as their specialist in civil rights, that we identify these cases immediately, that we respond immediately through the U.S. attorney and through the local office of the FBI. And that any instance in which the case can be appropriately handled by state and local officials we support them. In any instance in which the federal prosecution would produce justice or have a better chance of producing justice, we should take it in federal court.

MR. LIPMAN: Congressman Gregory Meeks of New York was quoted by the Associated Press as saying that he is frustrated, quote, "because white America has refused to acknowledge that a problem (with abuse of police officers) exists," unquote. Is white America in denial about police brutality and its harmful effect on the criminal justice system?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: I think that any time one person is abused by police, that is one person too much. For the authority of government, the symbol of government, the person who wears the badge that is the emblem of government, to abuse the citizens that he or she serves is one too many cases.

At the same time, one of the needs I think we have for collecting data is to understand the dimension of the problem. But let me clear: No matter what the data says, the perception in America today on the part of too many people is that police officers are not to be trusted. I think that a good many of those police officers who are not trusted should be trusted and somehow or another we have to bridge the gap between what is real and what is not and operate based on fact. And then when we see any example of misconduct, any example of policing that is not appropriate, we should take firm, effective action. Because policing, good policing, is at the heart of this nation.

It is at the heart of our democratic government. And to tolerate misconduct cannot be done in this country.

MR. LIPMAN: Let me follow up on what you just said. Is the impression that there is widespread police misconduct; is there a difference among the minority community and the white community in this perception? And if so, how can you overcome that?

ATTY GEN. RENO: In 1995 as I recall, a Gallup showed a distinction between trust in the minority community, of policing practices, and trust in the community generally. I have not seen a later poll than that. But certainly, anecdotally, and from my conversations with representatives of the communities across America, that is clearly the case.

What can be done about it is what we have discussed; community policing, working with the community.

It is fascinating to see a community police officer go into a neighborhood that has had a high crime rate. Many of the citizens, who could be very effective forces for good, of bringing people together, are afraid to come out from behind their doors. The young people are unsupervised. They need guidance, but they are on a rampage. And we saw that as I came to Washington, in 1993, as youth violence was on the upswing.

With a good community police officer, he will make it safe enough in that community for the leader to come out from behind her door, to come down to the community center to sit and talk with people. Ministers will come into the community. They will start working together. The police office will identify the youngster who can be leader, who can make a difference. He will become that youngster's mentor; bring him on his side, recruit some others.

It is just fascinating to watch the dynamics of a good police officer who is dedicated, who understands young people and the difference that they can make; the difference they make for an elderly person, who is kind of suspicious. She comes down to the center now and really holds forth on just what should be done to get her community cleaned up.

I was in Indianapolis last week. And it is fascinating to see what is happening, through a community Weed and Seed Program, all through Indianapolis and how the faith community, police officers, the schools and citizens -- most of all citizens - are working together to make a difference.

There is so much that we can be doing in this area. We must focus on it. We can bridge these gaps. We can make a difference.

But most of all, we can give this country tremendous resources of police officers who care and can be trusted with young people who care and have so much to offer, if we can only unlock the door they hide behind.

MR. LIPMAN: You mentioned community policing.

This question is: The inspector general has been somewhat critical of the COPS program's use of resources. Is the future of the program in jeopardy?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think the program has done so much across the country in providing police who relate to the community, who understand the concept of community policing.

But early on I resolved to make sure that the inspector general was involved in the COPS program, because there was going to be a great number of grants across the country, and I wanted to make sure that the money would be spent as wisely as possible or that we would identify it early on. And so I asked the inspector general to be involved. I have been impressed with the fact that COPS is referring cases to the inspector general's program, to make sure that we look at it, to make sure the monies are spent. I think it will only strengthen the program.

MR. LIPMAN: Shifting gears a little bit -- we're almost out of time -- Monday is the anniversary of the Waco disaster and the Oklahoma City bombings. What have you learned from those experiences? And is America being -- is the American

public being protected by (sic) the threat of militia groups nationwide? What is being done to prevent future flare-ups?

ATTY GEN. RENO: It is important in all of these instances to say you cannot be sure that you can prevent everything. But we have tried to do everything we can, through appropriate precautions, through sound law enforcement, to identify problems before they arise and to take effective action. We will continue to be vigilant in that regard.

I think it is so important, again, to recognize that we can do so much if we reach out to the community, to people who care, and if we understand that we must do everything humanly possible to prevent such tragedies from (sic) the future.

MR. LIPMAN: I have three cards here that ask about the District of Columbia. You said that you oppose sending prisoners away from their families and communities. Why is the Department of Justice dispersing and banishing several thousand District of Columbia prisoners and supporting private prisons for the District of Columbia?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I oppose sending people away when you possibly can -- there are at points reached an economy of scale where you simply cannot house people adjacent to every community where they come from. And so I think it is important to do whatever we can for those coming back to the community, sooner, rather than later, to make sure that we provide them a reentry to the community in an orderly way that will give them a chance to get off to a strong and positive future.

That leads to a category of offenders that I think are very important to watch. Those are the people 18 to 35 years of age, the people that have so much to offer if they can get a job, if they can get off on the right foot.

We need to focus on that category of offender and make sure as they return from prison, whether it be in D.C. or anywhere around this country, that they have the

opportunity for job training and placement that can get them into strong and positive activities that will keep them out of trouble and make them a candidate for a strong, successful future.

MR. LIPMAN: Ms. Reno, before we get to the last question I have some parting gifts for you: a certificate of appreciation suitable for framing -- (laughter) -- and much coveted National Press Club mug. And now, the last question -- actually, two questions on the same subject. Do you have any ethical qualms about serving a president who was just held in contempt by the court? And you are known as a person of integrity. How can you work for a president who lied to you and other cabinet members, let alone who may have lied under oath?

ATTY GEN. RENO: As I have said on a number of occasions, I cannot comment on it because it is a matter that is still at issue. And I think it is time to move on and deal with the problems that this nation faces, including the one I have discussed today: how we give our children a strong, constructive future. And he has done so much in that regard: how we deal with the problems around the world, how we prepare for the next century, in terms of cybercrime and tools that stagger the imagination and convert vanity to prayer. It is time to move on.

MR. LIPMAN: Ms. Reno, I'd like to thank you for coming today. I'd also like to thank National Press Club staff members Leigh Ann Boren, Pat Nelson, Melanie Abdow Dermott and Howard Rothman for organizing today's lunch. We're adjourned.

Thank you. (Applause.)

END.