



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

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REMARKS OF THE HONORABLE JANET RENO
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES
TO THE
OAKLAND METROPOLITAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

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Oakland Marriott City Center

Emelyn Jewett Ballroom
1001 Broadway
Oakland, California

Friday, December 3, 1999

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO:

Thank you, Tom Quinlan. My thanks to the Oakland Chamber of Commerce, to the Commonwealth Club, and to everyone in the East Bay area who has made this day possible.

We are the greatest industrial nation in the world. But our real strength does not lie in our factories or our technology. Our ultimate strength is in our people.

What impacts the lives of our people most? It may be your child's teacher that gives you new hope that he really is going to learn to read, maybe your boss and your fellow workers and how your boss treats you and the care that she or he gives to the working environment in which you spend most of your day. It may be the policeman, who by tone of voice and manner and firmness conveys trust but a willingness to enforce the law. It may be a job or lack of a

job. It may be the doctor, the rabbi, the priest. It may be a stranger who feels alienated or a stranger that comes together with you. It may be your neighbor or your grocer. But it is one word, "community," a word that means so much to so many people.

YOUNG PEOPLE: Janet Reno, we're the young people of Oakland, and we're here today to support Mumia Abu-Jamal, an African-American political prisoner on death row in Pennsylvania. And we're here in a peaceful manner. And we're here representing the people of Oakland, people of color on the outside right now. And Oakland supports Mumia.

GENERAL RENO: Here's what I would suggest, ladies.

YOUNG PEOPLE: (Unintelligible.)

GENERAL RENO: Wait, wait, wait, wait, wait, everybody. Let me hear. Let me hear them. It's very important that we hear young people. Let me hear them.

(Applause.)

YOUNG PEOPLE: (Unintelligible.)

GENERAL RENO: May I suggest this. Let me finish talking, and then let me spend some time with you, get all the details, and follow up. Do you have enough time? I won't take more than about 25 minutes.

YOUNG PEOPLE: Thank you. We want to hear what you have to say. But we also want everyone else who's concerned about community safety to hear what we have to say. So I just want to make a brief statement.

GENERAL RENO: Okay. That will be fine. Go right ahead.

YOUNG PEOPLE: Thank you. We're here today to talk about real community safety, and no community is safe as long as police corruption goes unchecked. We want to ask -- we want to ask Janet Reno to launch an investigation into the Philadelphia Police Department's handling of the case of Mumia Abu-Jamal. We believe that there was corruption, and we want a -- want that investigated. We want -- we want you to take a stand for real community safety along with the investigation.

We have a pledge here, a pledge for real community safety that we want Janet Reno to sign. And it's a pledge that to have real community safety is launching an investigation into the Philadelphia Police Department, which has already been done and came up with a lot of corruptions of what happened there. And we need another one. And so, we want you, Janet Reno, to sign this pledge for real community safety for our community, low-income communities, communities of color, for Mumia Abu-Jamal. For Mumia.

GENERAL RENO: Thank you very much. I'll be happy to talk with you right after I finish.

YOUNG PEOPLE: Will you sign the pledge?

GENERAL RENO: I don't know. I haven't read it.

(Applause.)

The business community, it is people speaking out. It is people with strong feelings. It is people coming together to resolve the issues that divide us. Six-and-a-half years ago, I left Miami, a rambunctious young city that had its problems and a city that I loved. I worried, when I came to Washington, that I would lose my sense of community. But I have found that not to be the case. I have just gained communities.

This is about my third visit to Oakland and, to the East Bay area, my fifth. And each time I come, I gain a strength. Mr. Quinlan asked me if these things got old hat. They don't get old hat when you go to Highland Hospital, listen to young residents, trauma surgeons and people who care, coming together to figure out what they do to make sure that there are no more young people in those hospital beds who are the victims of violence.

(Applause.)

It's not old hat when you go to Minneapolis five years ago and see what the situation was and come back last spring and see what it is now. It's not old hat to go to Boston and hear how they have reduced the number of youth homicides over a two- or three-year period by the community coming together. It gives me faith and hope and a conviction that America, as it comes together, can solve its problems

with respect to crime, with respect toward the economy, with respect to diversity, and with respect to the quality of living.

What makes a community? What makes a community strong? What makes it safe? What makes it prosperous? What brings it together? I think the first has already been alluded to. A community that is strong is a community that has come together, where everyone feels that they have a role in addressing the problems that plague the community. A police officer can't do it alone. Chief Word would tell you that his police department can't, by itself, deal with the problem of crime in Oakland. But a police department that has strong business community support can be a much stronger force.

The educators here will tell you that they can't educate by themselves. They need the police working with them in sensitive, thoughtful ways. But they also need the business community in terms of developing school-to-work programs, in terms of developing programs that give young people mentoring and tutoring opportunities that can open the doors to a future that is constructive and positive.

To doctors, teachers, parks and recreation specialists, community activists, all of us must come together if we're to make a difference. But I will tell you that the glue, the strength I see in communities comes for certain when the business community is involved in ever so many ways.

The second factor, the second ingredient of a strong community is that people must come first -- all the people, not just some of the people.

(Applause.)

We talk in terms of programs. But today, I look down on two -- I didn't look down on them figuratively. I was standing up and they were in bed. But I talked with two young men who had been the victims of violence. These were human beings who had been the subject of violence that did not have to occur. It's not a program that will help them. It was those residents, those physicians who had saved their lives. It was social workers, educators, street people, and others who were doing so much to make a difference in the -- their lives and the lives of others, putting people first, putting all people first, children, the disadvantaged, minorities, making

everyone realize that this country is a land of equal opportunity, and if we leave some people back, we are weaker and the lesser for it all.

(Applause.)

Communities must invest in people and invest wisely. They must begin early and build foundations. The child development experts have consistently told me that the first three years of life are the most important. That's when the child learns the concept of reward and punishment and develops a conscience. 50 percent of all learned human response is learned in the first year of life.

If a child grows up not to know what punishment means, if a child does not have a conscience, what good are all the prisons going to be 15 years from now unless we make an investment in children now?

What good --

(Applause.)

What good are all the great universities going to be in terms of preparing our whole population to live and work in the 21st century if we don't provide that child a foundation in the first years of life that is so critically important? Look at how we will waste our money if we pay for remedial programs in community colleges because we fail to invest up front in sound instead of childcare. We can make so much of a difference.

(Applause.)

Something is wrong with the nation that pays its football players in the six-digit figures and pays its school teachers what we pay them --

(Applause.)

The business community can be a tremendous ally, a tremendous ally of law enforcement and of education. But it's not just there. The 45-year-old who's out of a job because he -- his skill has become obsolete, we've got to develop consistent retraining programs that he knows or she knows will be available to them, much as K through 12 is available, so that people can know that there is a long and evolving

opportunity in life.

But as we give people opportunity, we must hold them accountable. We too often seek to hold people accountable who don't have the tools or the wherewithal at age 12 or 13 or 14 to be accountable. Let's give them the tools. Let's let them know that there's no excuse for putting a gun up beside somebody's head and threatening them, that there are going to be fair, firm consequences that fit the crime. But let us make sure that we balance opportunity and the tools to live a strong and positive life with accountability.

What is the Federal role in this? I never liked the Feds coming to town in Miami and telling us what to do or telling us we want this and giving nothing in return. And so I resolved when I came to Washington to do everything I could to form a partnership with communities across America. And in that effort, we have funded and encouraged new community strategies, community policing, crime prevention programs, community courts. I've encouraged Federal prosecutors and investigators to work closely with their local counterparts and to reach out through -- across disciplines, to work with educators, the faith community, and other local leaders. The administration in Congress have taken steps to reduce violent crime, passing the Brady Act and the Assault Weapons Ban, and we've mounted an unprecedented effort to get illegal guns off the streets. We've expanded the nation's drug court program and supported states in the fight against domestic violence.

But throughout the last six years, I've seen over and over and over again that where the difference is made is in community and in the people who make up that community and in the businesses that support progressive efforts within the community. Communities across America have learned that when you commit ingenuity, management skills, expertise, you can make a difference.

Communities across America have learned that when you come together, when you use your best knowledge to invest in people, there is a resolve. And what is the resolve? Violent crime has dropped seven years in a row to its lowest level in three decades.

Murders have fallen by more than 20 percent in larger cities and suburban communities. The juvenile crime rate is down for the fourth year in a row.

Now, as a former state prosecutor, I know it can go back up like that. And it goes back up too often because people become complacent and they say we solved the crime problem; now, let's think about something else. Or they think it's easier to go play golf on a Sunday morning than it is to work with kids. We cannot become complacent. So there is still too much violence in this land.

We are still one of the most violent nations in the world. But, ladies and gentlemen, this does not have to be. Let me give you an example. In the five years from 1992 through 1996, the City of Chicago recorded 3,063 gun homicides, 3,063. In the same period, Toronto, across the border, recorded 100 gun homicides -- two cities of similar size. Violence as we know it in America does not have to be.

We have a golden opportunity right now. By virtually any measure, Americans are experiencing unprecedented economic prosperity. Now is the time to act. We can renew our efforts, strengthen our partnerships, use common sense in analyzing crime problems and designing strategies to solve them, and watch crime continue to go down.

Today, I come before you with what is, in part, a challenge and with what is, in part, an earnest plea to harness the power, the ingenuity, and the resources of the business community in the East Bay area to further our advantage in the fight against crime and to end for once and for all the culture of violence in this country, to use the prosperity of today to build a better future for tomorrow and to raise a new generation of Americans prepared to live and work safely and peacefully and constructively in the 21st century.

Let us look at how we provide a comprehensive system that gives our children the foundation of living upon which we can build opportunity, upon which we can build skills, and upon which we can rest safely. In the midst of our nation's prosperity, we have an opportunity to make sure that the economic expansion extends to the most economically disadvantaged and vulnerable of our citizens and that no one is left behind.

Now, some of you business people may say, "That's not my problem." If we make all our citizens productive, if we build a work force with the skills necessary to fill the jobs to maintain your company as a

first-rate company and this nation as a first-rate nation, everybody is going to be the better for it.

(Applause.)

The unskilled and unemployed are responsible for a significant portion of the crime in this country. But crime and prosperity go together. Over 40 percent of the nation's prison population never completed high school. About 36 percent of our jail population was unemployed prior to their most recent arrest. And nearly half of this group had a monthly income of less than \$600. Given the right opportunities, however, the economically disadvantaged could become part of the work force that fills the jobs and maintains this country's prosperity. It is an investment that is not penny-wise or pound-foolish.

What can the business community do? First of all, the biggest complaint I hear from principals is, I can't get parents to school for parent-teacher conferences or to find out how their children are doing or to have their -- see their children in school plays. Give them time from work to go see their children in action at school, and it will return --

(Applause.)

Just think of what would happen in the East Bay area if every business joined with schools and pediatricians across the East Bay area to make sure that every child that was eligible was enrolled in the children's health insurance program which benefits disadvantaged children. It's an investment, again, in our future. The child who does not receive proper preventative medical care up front is going to be a burden on you and me and our communities as taxpayers down the road because we failed to invest in preventative medical care that could have saved dollars down the road. Here is a way with a program that now exists that we can make a difference. Think of what would happen if we could, through employers, through schools, through pediatricians, make sure that every child is registered. Let us make sure that children have mentors and tutors who can make a difference.

I've been to Boston to a program at Roxbury where there are tutors and mentors who have been trained and who know how to talk to kids. They come from the corporate sector, and they have made such a

difference. For I asked the young people, what could have been done to have prevented you from getting into trouble in the first place. And they say, somebody to talk to, somebody who understands how hard it is to grow up today, how unsafe and alone you too often feel, and somebody who knows when to give me a pat on the back and when to give me a figurative kick in the backside.

Children are more alone and unsupervised, according to the Carnegie Foundation, than in any time in our history. The corporate community providing that mentor, that role model, that person to look up to can make such a difference.

You can, for example, deal with a crisis that I heard described by both teachers -- and it may not be so in this instance; but in another city, I asked the young people what we should do about violence. They said, We think we've got that licked, but what we want are computers. We don't have any computers in our school. And then, he said, but what we need is somebody to teach the teachers how to teach us to use the computers. And one of the teachers said "Amen." Think of what you could do in designing with an elementary school the best computer training program imaginable. The teachers and everybody would appreciate it.

I have just come, as I've indicated, from a program of the East Oakland Partnership to Reduce Juvenile Gun Violence. It's a partnership which involves a collaboration of 26 public and nonprofit agencies and involves Highland Hospital. I asked the partners who were there today, when I told them that I was coming here, What could I tell the community about what needs to be done? What can the business community do to help you? They said, almost right out of the box, Get involved with the schools.

And today, you'll hear about Bayer's collaboration with the City of Berkeley in the school-to-work program, which takes students in high school and their first year of junior college and teaches them skills industry is looking for. You'll hear how the police department has worked with Federal Express and the community surrounding the airport to ensure that community policing officers keep in touch with local businesses' safety concerns. You'll hear from the Oakland A's, a baseball team that helps refurbish Little League fields so inner city kids have alternatives to hanging out on the streets and getting into trouble.

And I just want to tell you a personal experience. I went to a Miami community where kids could not play on the field because it was so torn up; they had so much glass and bottles and junk. They didn't have uniforms. We suddenly had the Reno's Rangers. And those kids were so excited and so involved. And so I salute you for that effort. It makes again such a difference.

The A's also have a Read to Succeed program, encouraging young people who might ordinarily not pick up a book to read four books and get a free ticket to an A's game. Way to go.

And you heard from your U.S. Attorney, our great Bob Mueller, about the valuable work he's doing with the Oakland Chamber of Commerce and the City Manager on Project Exile. You'll see the message on billboards and buses in the coming weeks: In Oakland, illegal guns get you five years in prison. But you will hear more because I asked -- as I asked this morning about what the Oakland Chamber of Commerce was doing, they suddenly started talking about a whole new additional inventory of things that they're talking about. And it was exciting and wonderful. And I just congratulate you for the enthusiasm that you're conveying to at least the community around you.

We are seeing many different kinds of partnerships form for the purpose of creating safer, more sustainable communities. Public-private partnerships contribute so much and leave so little room for criminals to get hold. In Brooklyn, New York, a pharmaceutical company worked with a local law enforcement effort, educators, and community organizations to renovate a 150-year-old building for a K-8 -- through 8 public school. They installed a video monitoring system for the local subway stations, shut down open-air drug markets, built a park and a playground, and encouraged other businesses to move into the area. And crime has dropped dramatically in the two precincts surrounding the area.

But there are two problems that businesses must deal with because they sometimes find them in their own home ground. The first is domestic violence, which is, with increasing frequency, spilling over to the workplace. We must do more in terms of employee assistance programs, in terms of partnership with the medical community and the criminal justice community to end violence in the home. For unless we focus on domestic violence in every arena in which we see it, we will never end violence on our streets, in our schools, or in this nation.

It is an effort that we must renew a focus upon if we are to make a difference.

And the second is workplace violence itself. Let us work together with the mental health community and with others to establish means of identifying early warning signals and developing means within the workplace to resolve conflict without knives and guns and fists and violence.

And finally, there is a phenomenon developing in this country that we must come to grips with if we are ever going to effectively end the culture of violence in this country. For the next five years, each year, 400- to 500,000 people will return from jails and prisons across this country to communities like Oakland, Richmond, Albany, Berkeley, San Francisco. This is because of the success of police and prosecutors in sending people to jail for the crimes they have committed.

We can let them come back without an education. We can let them come back to the apartment over the open-air drug market where they got into trouble in the first place. We can let them come back without a safety support system. And guess what? They're going to be doing it all over again, and we're going to see the crime rate go up again.

Or, with the business community taking the lead, we can develop reentry programs where business, law enforcement, and others work together to make sure that, while in prison, that person utilizes their time through constructive educational programs that will prepare them for the workplace and make them a constructive contributor. It will involve focus on alternative housing sites, on support mechanisms. I have proposed a concept of a reentry court that will properly control public safety considerations. But unless we come to grips with this issue, we will never begin to face the problems on a long range basis.

What can business do? You can do so much. You can bring a business-like analysis to the problems and help police and others try to figure out where the crime is, what the impact is, and how we can address it. You can take on challenges. How do you take that housing stock that's 50 or 100 years old and delapidated and decaying and a problem? Use the contractors in the community to be innovative and bold about how you clear it away, how you refurbish it, how you build

it up, but how you make the environment of Oakland, of Richmond, of the communities we care about in this nation an environment in which you would want your children to live.

For the last six-and-a-half years, I have had the chance to visit with people across this nation. I came to Washington with the devout belief that public service was one of the greatest callings that anybody could undertake. I came with an abiding faith and regard for this nation and a deep love for my country. I've now had an opportunity to see emerging democracy, ministers of justice coming from small countries just coming out from dictatorships, other countries having taken the leap a long time ago, but falling backwards, and now returning to the folds of democracy. And you appreciate democracy as never before. You appreciate this nation as never before.

And these six-and-a-half years have given me an absolute conviction that, when America comes together, when it works together in communities, it can solve its problems and truly make a difference and that the communities of America, whether it be Oakland or Miami, can have a strong future, a safe future, a prosperous future when people come together with business as the glue that makes it happen.

Thank you.

(Applause and, at 1:09 p.m., end of remarks.)