



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

REMARKS OF ATTORNEY GENERAL JANET RENO

FANNIE MAE

CORPORATE-COMMUNITY COALITIONS FOR PUBLIC SAFETY

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P R O C E E D I N G S

(8:20 a.m.)

GENERAL RENO: If I've done anything in Washington at the Department of Justice, it's because of people like Jamie, Wilma, and so many others, and I just thank you very, very much. You've been great colleagues.

I love your city. I've walked it at dawn and late at night. I have seen it from so many different perspectives. I saw it struggle in the beginning, and now I see it just changing before my eyes, that I have to walk at least once a week in certain places to make sure that I keep up with what's going up or what's coming down.

There's a new spirit as you walk through communities, Mr.

Mayor. It is truly exciting what Wilma is doing in community prosecution and Steve with Weed and Seed, and Deborah, it's so nice to talk about this. It really is breathtaking, but you have an extraordinary opportunity.

I come from a big, sprawling area, and you've got to get your hands around the whole area, and when you get a piece here and a piece over here, it is a problem. Yes, you have Prince George's County, but there's something discrete about the District, and it's small enough to really make a difference, and to focus as you're focusing, Mr. Mayor, on the two precincts is really, I think, exciting.

But I think the key -- we have always thought crime-fighting is just policing, but the Chief will tell you, I think quicker than anybody else, that it begins with early on, and one of the areas that I think we can do so much in is later, in reentry programs that make a difference.

But I have been excited because in Minneapolis for the first 2 or 3 years of my time at the Justice Department we couldn't get the city turned around. It continued to be violent. People in the Phillips area continued to call and complain to the U.S. Attorney, and then suddenly the private sector became involved, became involved in nontraditional ways by developing child care plus educational opportunities for young parents, doing so much to turn a community around.

I watched Boston reduce youth violence and the homicides involving youth plummeted to zero, because everybody got involved. From zero to 3 child care, health care, better courts, better staffed courts, drug courts that weren't spread too thin.

In Brooklyn I watched what the private sector had done in turning the whole community around.

You've got this wonderful opportunity, Mr. Mayor, and we want to be a partner with you in every way that we can, but it takes pieces almost like a puzzle being placed into it. I suggest to you the one area that I think we can focus on

that I think all of the country has been remiss in is focusing on ex-offenders who are coming back from prison.

They are coming back in this community from Lorton. They are coming back sometimes to no jobs, unable to get a job. They're coming back, being stopped by police because they are there, and somebody knows them as a repeat offender.

How can we give these people jobs? How can we give them the skills to get the jobs? How can we -- and this is just something I would suggest as a public-private partnership. If churches and businesses adopted a person as they were being sentenced in superior court to 5 years in prison and started planning with prison authorities for job training, for completion of their educational GED, and with an opportunity to focus on here is a job you can come back to if you play by the rules, and we will give you support, here is a community police officer that will be your mentor, that won't put you down but will tell you when you've done wrong and give you a pat on the back, there are these things that can be done to make such an incredible difference.

And for kids going into the system, they want so to be somebody to make a difference, to contribute, and it is so touching to see two young men from Dorchester, Massachusetts, standing in the Great Hall of the Department of Justice with two police officers, community police officers, telling the President of the United States, Mr. President, these guys got us off on the right foot, and we're going to college because of them instead of going to prison.

So both ways you can make a difference, but that is not going to help if we don't address the issue of housing, if we don't address the issue of health care, and again you have some wonderful opportunities, because there is no other city that I know of that has just such instant transportation resources that for many other cities are not connected.

It's just an exciting time to be in Washington. I have been

here 7-1/2 years now, and I can trace the change, and it was a wonderful city to begin with. It is a remarkably wonderful city now.

(Applause.)

MR. TYDINGS: We have got some time, a few minutes for some questions and discussion. John.

VOICE: Attorney General Reno, Mayor Williams, PEPCO is an employer with jobs that I think could fit the bill for what you're talking about, for folks who have been offenders and so forth, but we serve the public, and we are with the public all the time with these employees, and I would like you to speak to the opportunity or lack thereof for protecting a corporate like PEPCO if we were to get into a program of employing offenders, or prior offenders.

Is there a way we can protect ourselves with a partnership with Government to help shoulder that potential liability we have where things could go wrong?

GENERAL RENO: That's a very interesting question. I would like to think about that. But I will tell you what Alvin Chapman, then the publisher and CEO of Knight-Ridder, said when I approached him. He said, well, Janet, I guess we will have some liability problems, but we'll start them out, and he did an interesting thing. He started them out selling newspapers on the streets, and he built a record slowly.

And so some have come up through the ranks into the Herald by taking a job with limited risk, setting a track record, giving them encouragement, providing -- and I don't know whether he's done this, but you can provide educational opportunities, give them the track record and the opportunity to build a track record, but with one caveat.

There is a sense of either you do it right, completely, or you have failed. We have got to give them, as we have in the drug court, the sense that okay, you might not have done that well, but then there's a program that the mayor

has, for example, that says you didn't do that one very well, but you haven't failed. You haven't committed another crime. We're going to work with you, and start building again, and trying not to give up on anybody.

But you have raised a very interesting question. We have a project reentry program in the Department and, if I may, I will follow up with you and ask somebody to be in touch with your office, and whomever you suggest, to address that.

VOICE: Thank you very much.

VOICE: Last night at the dinner just around the corner we heard from David Gergen about some of the things they're doing in New York City. One of the things he mentioned in his after-dinner remarks was the investment the city had made in the police department, and new technology, which he said had significantly helped reduce the crime rate of New York City. Is that something that is a model for the country? Is it something we are looking at? Is it something that is transferable?

GENERAL RENO: What I think he's referring to is the program which has New York divided up by precincts and then does an analysis, so that you have a running analysis of what crime is occurring in that precinct, and the commander is responsible and has to report on a regular basis to the Chief.

All of these tools are wonderful tools. One of the things that I would love to see, Mr. Mayor, is the development of a data base that includes not just Washington but Prince George's County and Montgomery County, so that you had a sense when gangs move back and forth across the line that we could keep track of them, that the Washington Field Office of the FBI and Baltimore could track together, and we would have trained analysts who looked at the crime data and said, okay, here's a major drug organization that the police can go after, and here are leads that will help.

All of that type of technology can be extremely important, but there is nothing as important as the human factor in

terms of having trained analysts, and the one thing you have got to be cautious about is New York City has done an incredible job in reducing crime, but there are real concerns by minorities now.

And so that is why it becomes important again that you focus on the people, that you build the trust, that -- and it is wonderful to see a police officer who knows how to talk to a 15-year-old, who knows how to talk to him without putting him down, but being stern when he needs to be stern, and gives him a pat on the back when he needs to give him a pat on the back, and what the Chief is doing in terms of trying to address some of these issues of how do you talk to a young person, how do you talk to a person who may be on the verge of committing suicide, how do you talk to that elderly lady who won't come out from behind her door because she's afraid?

You start making her feel unafraid. Then she comes down to the community center and gives the Chief and the officers what-for because she now feels comfortable enough, and that is how you build community.

And then the kids start playing with the police officers in Little League ball at 4:00 in the afternoon, after the officer has gotten off-duty, because he's just gotten so involved with the community, and you just have a perfect opportunity.

You look at the different communities. You look at the fabric, and all the fabrics here, and you have just got to re-weave it.

VOICE: I've often thought one of the things that young people want more than anything else is a driver's license, and that one group in our society most likely to know what you need to do in order to get a driver's license are police officers, and if you could introduce police officers into the schools as teachers of driver education you could have a chance for a bonding around a common goal.

I don't know what the reaction of the school boards would

be, or the teacher's unions, or the police.

VOICE: That sounds like much more dangerous work than their normal --

(Laughter.)

VOICE: On the other hand, I think it would be welcomed by the youngsters, who see them as access to driver's licenses and passing the driver's test and that sort of thing, and I put that idea out for whatever it's worth.

GENERAL RENO: Part of it depends upon the officer, but with community prosecution, with Weed and Seed, with officers who care, and who relate to the community, and who live in the community, it is amazing what a driver's license -- we've now discovered what they also want is, they want to be able to vote when they get back from prison.

They say, we've served our time. We have done our time, we should have our civil rights immediately restored, we want to vote, and I think that was one of the most encouraging signs that I have seen, and so there are different things you can do. Having the community police officers in an area where there's one of the wards where there is a high incidence of offenders coming back, having police officers who could say, this is how you get your civil rights restored, and then send them down to Delegate Norton and get them started on home rule.

(Laughter.)

MS. GORELICK: You know, you have mentioned to me privately and you have said it again today that you think one of the big issues is essentially re-entry housing opportunities for people coming out of prison, and given how many -- the high proportion of our population here in D.C., relative to other jurisdictions, that experiences that problem -- I am aware of a couple of experiments around the country where that's being done.

I think it would be very useful to know what -- and maybe I

should know this, but I don't, but what within the Justice Department is known about what works, because we could, working with Sun Trust and Bank of America, and with some of the developers, come up with a concept that works financially if there is an income flow from some governmental program to pay rents.

I don't know how it works other places, but I would be more than happy to undertake it as a project if I knew what the best thinking was around the country.

GENERAL RENO: There is no best thinking.

MS. GORELICK: Is anybody doing anything good?

GENERAL RENO: Everybody is doing some wonderful things, but it depends on the community.

There is one key to it. To ultimately work, it has got to be comprehensive. You can't just look at the re-entry and not at the up-front. You can't just look at crime without looking at housing. You can't look at reduction of crime without looking at what you're doing to the trust factor, and it comes again to the human factor.

It was so interesting for me to see the relationships that had developed in Brooklyn, in Boston, in Minneapolis, in Seattle, and the more comprehensive you can be from early childhood on, the more important it is. You can't address the issue of youth violence unless you address the issue of domestic violence.

MS. GORELICK: I guess I was really asking who's paying for it.

GENERAL RENO: You take some grant moneys, you take some Weed and Seed money that Steve somehow finds, you take community policing moneys, you reach out to HHS, and Education and Labor, and start pulling moneys in from there, but you take all of your moneys that you can scrounge and then try to fit them into a hole, and then when there's a gap you say to Sun Trust, look, there's a

school that's right at the heart of a great reform. We need a partner for that school. Sun Trust is trying to come into this area. Do you want to be involved there?

And I'm not advocating for Sun Trust, but you put the pieces of the community together. You find the strengths of the community, you find the people that make a difference, and again you have the capacity here, because it is a discrete enough city, with enough going for it.

VOICE: As you say, there are so many pieces of the puzzle -- and who puts it all together? Is it Government, or the private sector, or some combination thereof, is it the Education Department, or Economic Development, and it's really all of those things. I think we struggle, as many of our other business partners do, in who do we look for in the public sector and in the private sector.

GENERAL RENO: Mr. Mayor, I don't want to be presumptuous, but we would work with you, but I think you look to the mayor to say, okay, here we are in Ward 7, and we need this piece, who's got a piece that can fit here? Is there something at the Justice Department? Would you check it, HHS? Let's see what Education has. What has Steve found? Who has a piece that can fit in there, and how can we scrounge this?

MAYOR WILLIAMS: Well, in that respect actually we have what we have launched as a part of this. All of you are going to cringe if I start talking about neighborhood action, so I won't, and the 3,000 people who came together at the convention center --

(Laughter.)

MAYOR WILLIAMS: We have a lot of people. We spent a lot of time talking about a plan for the city, and what we're doing now is, we translated that into an expectation for the city.

We're now moving this down to the neighborhood level, and we have someone who has been assigned in each of the

different neighborhoods to work with the neighbors around the school, and what are the needs, and there's also going to be a coordinator who's going to actually be the operational agent to try to bring together the faith community, the Government, the Federal Government.

We talked to the White House D.C. Task Force yesterday about this, the private sector, to put those resources in that niche where they can make a difference down at the neighborhood level. That's exactly what we're trying to do.

GENERAL RENO: Elizabeth Schorr, who's Dan Schorr's wife, is one of the best people I've ever seen in terms of how you build neighborhoods, but she's also a very realistic person, and she says the most difficult thing to do, you can get the dynamics of a neighborhood together by force of personality, by people coming together. It is very hard to build beyond that neighborhood and replicate it on and on. That's the reason the ward focus I think is so important, and you just build piece by piece.

The most important thing is to never give up. There is a tendency for people to move on. Somebody gets promoted to a bigger bank, to another business, and Government changes, the administration changes, and you sometimes feel like you're starting all over again, or some agency just looks at you like, what are you talking about?

You can't give up, and what I think happens is that too many people don't provide for the transition. All you need is that critical force that suddenly clicks a neighborhood into really dynamic initiatives of working together and provides a lasting commitment, and with this city you have a better chance of building something permanent than almost any other place that I know.

VOICE: Just an observation in this area. I think the community-based entities that would seem to have the largest and the greatest staying power in our experience are these community development corporations, and we spend, invest several hundred thousand dollars a year as soft equity participants in housing, soft equity meaning we

won't get it back, but it's that piece that makes things work, and what you're talking about is that model pertains, that somehow it could be attached to CDC's, and they seem to have the real staying power. They know how to package this stuff together, and we know how to work with them.

It is a fascinating notion that you build that around -- in my way of thinking, build that around those organizations, because they don't go away. They really are there until the area is completely developed, and there's no more need, in which case we all declare victory, but there's a long time before that's going to happen.

GENERAL RENO: I would see it with the community development, the mayor's office, how you've got it structured, as building blocks.

You start with parents -- I'm talking again about youth violence and crime -- building stronger, better parents who are equipped. How you teach parents, if they don't have an extended family, to be better parents, there is some research now coming out on the whole connection between parents and youth violence, and so you start there, then you look at proper health care, proper prenatal care, and you figure out how you can make sure that every child in that ward that you're focused on has appropriate medical care and screening.

Then you look at what I call educare, not child care, because those first 3 years are so vital, and it may be that you have a bank or something, and there are child care issues, or somebody else joins together so that two or three people in the community, or two or three businesses join together for a great child care center but there's no place to put it.

And so we figure out, oh, that place that the city has owned that hasn't been used for so long, let's get that renovated, and you almost make an inventory of what is in that community. Oh, here's a piece. I can put that here, and I can put this here.

And then you look at the schools and the after-school and the summertime and truancy, and what you do to get people back to school. You start looking at aptitudes.

The greatest -- let me give you an example of one great thing you could do. This city needs competent people, competent and fluent in cyber issues. I mean, Government is coming to a screeching halt because we can't hire enough people to maintain the security, to expand, to develop it.

Take the kids in ward 7 and start when the educators say it is the best time to start to determine who has the aptitude for it, and then start making sure they have sufficient computers and sufficient learning so that you start fast-tracking those with the clear aptitude for it, and take them right along, where in other instances they might be ignored and might never be known for the capacity that they have.

How can you find out from that little kid who comes to school with a runny nose because nobody is taking care of him, and nobody is teaching him, nobody is reading to him, nobody is showing him how to use a computer at 3, to work with a mouse to play his games, how you identify him early on and fast-track him into these skills that will repay him many times down the road would really be exciting.

VOICE: It really seems that so much of what we're saying in terms of a long-term solution, that the safety has been apparent. I know the mayor and I are going to dedicate a child care facility sometime this morning. Interestingly, the name of it is New Image Child Development Center, and I suppose that is special meaning based upon what you said, but how do we, as a community, encourage more responsible parenting as a longer-term answer to safety?

GENERAL RENO: The greatest single problem I think we face, the lady sitting on my right I think left Government because she wanted to make sure that she focused -- I think being a parent is the single most difficult thing I know to do. I think it takes hard work, love, intelligence, and an awful lot of luck, and I raised two children for whom I was

the legal guardian from the time they were 15.

I think we can construct workplaces -- and again you can use wards 7 and 8. If there was this, how do we structure a workplace -- and Government should be better at it. How can we structure a workplace that will give parents in those communities the chance to spend quality, both parents spend quality time with their children?

I have a theory, and I've been told by my friends at the Department of Justice to stop talking about it because it marginalizes me, but every time I do people appreciate it. Have two shifts, a parent shift in the morning for school children that permits a parent to drop the kids off at school and pick them up at about 2:30 or 3:00 and take them home and spend quality time with them, and then the golf shift, that works from about 11:00 to 8:00.

And then the other thing it would save you is a lot of money for expanded highways, because we wouldn't have to worry as much about rush hours, and we could extend the work day and be more productive.

MS. GORELICK: Who gets the golf shift?

(Laughter.)

MR. TYDINGS: Well, I am mindful -- well, we have time for one more.

VOICE: I just would like to circle back on this education, or training, or citizenship help for these returning inmates.

We have 10 or 11,000 inmates in our system at any given moment, and that means that each year we have literally thousands returning to our society, and when I was on the control board I had some oversight responsibilities for the corrections department, and it was shocking to me that the warden, we provided virtually no meaningful education, at least in my judgment, for these inmates.

And now State ready sentenced felons are migrating into the Bureau of Prisons system throughout the country, and I was wondering at the Federal level whether the Bureau of Prisons, Department of Justice, or perhaps Department of Education is doing anything to really train and educate -- there's some push-back, I understand, from Congress.

GENERAL RENO: Big push-back.

VOICE: But what is happening there?

GENERAL RENO: Congress in 1994 I think amended the Pell grant provisions to prevent prisoners from taking advantage of the Pell grants, and that was one of the most severe blows that we experienced in terms of the Bureau of Prisons operations, because the correlation between offenders who had received Pell grants who had completed college, or at least had taken some significant college courses, and recidivism was clear. I mean, there was a clear correlation between reduction and recidivism.

I just started -- and I'm tickled that you would raise that subject, because I just raised the issue again yesterday and said, let's make a run at it. Let's try to show what can be done, because everywhere I go people say, this is key.

In the meantime, the Bureau of Prisons is scrounging dollars to try to give people opportunities in certain key areas, in community colleges with associate degrees, or particular skills, to give them educational opportunities.

If the private sector joined with us in terms of an effective effort to get the Pell grants restored, I think that would be very, very important.

The other thing that I think is so important, and D.C. could become really great at that, is having continuing education so that when a person's skill has become obsolete, as skills are becoming obsolete from moment to moment, there is a place that you can go that you know for a reasonable sum, and that there would be provisions for

those who couldn't afford it, you could get retrained into a new skill.

I would love to see our school system looking at computer skills and basic skills that you knew were going to be lasting, and kind of the line that runs through it, but when somebody has been trained on the XYZ machine, it's a very complicated piece of machinery, and it's suddenly absolutely obsolete, there would be a place in Washington or Southern Maryland or Northern Virginia where people could be effectively retrained immediately.

VOICE: If I might just make a suggestion, and maybe you're already doing this, but with the Congress, the restoration of Pell grants and getting the right thing done for training of inmates, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce under Tom Donahue is extremely powerful now with this Congress, and this is a business issue, so I would suggest that if someone hasn't already, that the U.S. Chamber be approached, because if you can get them for an ally --

MR. TYDINGS: It's interesting, because they're getting ready to host their National Business Issues Conference here in Washington in a matter of days, and that's where they will construct their public policy agenda.

GENERAL RENO: The mayor made an interesting comment, too. If we could get Congress to give us a pilot, because we can identify the Federal prisoners coming out of Washington, and we might be able, again, for those that were adopted, or sponsored by a private NGO or a church, or private business, or something like that, they could become eligible -- I mean, there's so much that you could do.

MAYOR. WILLIAMS: We've got about 40 things to do now.

(Laughter.)

MR. TYDINGS: The agenda is almost full. I know we're going to leave here and go over to Folger Hall on the campus of George Washington University to continue this conversation, but please join me.

I sit here, frankly, and I have to sort of make a little confession sitting up here, that as I observed and listened to the Attorney General, that we were not just hearing a standard Department of Justice kind of presentation, that she has a special caring and affection for this city and for this marketplace, and I think for that we are truly, truly blessed.

Join me in thanking her.

(Applause.)

(Whereupon, at 8:55 a.m., the meeting adjourned.)