



Transcripts of Attorney General John Ashcroft
National Community Policing Conference
July 15, 2002

ATTORNEY GENERAL ASHCROFT: Please be seated. Thank you.

Well, thank you standing up, and thank you for sitting back down. You know, too often a standing ovation is used as a cover for a mass exodus. I think I could safely say that no one left and a few people actually came in. So that's good.

What a pleasure it is for me to be here with you today. And I want to thank Carl Peed. I call him "Coach" -- but he's had almost as many jobs as I have. My wife says, "What's the matter, can't you hold a job?" Carl's been a sheriff and a law enforcement officer, but was a coach at one time. And when I think of the people who really taught me lessons, I think they've been law enforcement people and coaches. We've got it all rolled together with Carl.

I want to thank the Washington, D.C. police chief, Charles Ramsey, for his hard work in bringing together the leaders in community policing from all across America here to the nation's capital. And it's an honor to be here with so many law enforcement authorities and scholars who dedicate their lives to keeping our communities and the United States of America safe. I thank you for your tireless efforts not just in terms of your traditional law enforcement duties but in terms of what you've done to help us in the war on terrorism. Your contributions are both vital and valued, and I commend you for your service.

Today we gather at a unique moment in America's history, a time in which the work of those who dedicate their lives to protecting America and its citizens -- well, it's never been more important than it is today. Just over 10 months ago, our nation came under attack. The agents of terror who are responsible for the violence of September 11th lived among us for many months, moving unnoticed through our cities, our neighborhoods, and our public spaces. They were here. They continue to maintain an active presence within our borders. And there are those who are waiting to strike us again. And it's our responsibility and our opportunity to make sure that they do not succeed in striking us again.

In formulating our response, we've borrowed something from

a previous Department of Justice, Robert F. Kennedy's Department of Justice, where it was said that they would arrest a mobster for, quote, "spitting on the sidewalk" if it would help in the fight against organized crime. Well, we've been similarly aggressive in our effort to prevent future terror attacks. We've also recognized, as Kennedy did, that law enforcement alone cannot protect our citizens. We must rely on citizens themselves for our homeland security. Kennedy said that, and I quote, "Every society gets the kind of criminal it deserves. What is equally true is that every community gets the kind of law enforcement it insists on." His words reflect the high value our society places on self-governance. If citizens want to live in safety, they must play an active role in protecting their communities.

And I think the real virtue and value of community-oriented policing is that it helps people understand that they don't have to move to live in a safer neighborhood. They can participate in making their neighborhoods safer, and that's the job of every single citizen. Community-oriented policing is a way of saying to citizens that we have citizen participation in policing.

Prevention has always been a guiding principle of community policing. And it is now more important than ever that we adhere to that principle as we work together to protect America. Since law enforcement agencies began partnering with citizens through community policing, we've seen significant drops in crime rates. We've watched crime-ridden neighborhoods be restored and strengthened bonds of trust and communication between law enforcement officers and the community and citizens in the community. When citizens become active stakeholders in securing their own safety in their communities from another attack, they're more likely to be alert to danger signals. Engaged citizens can gather and relay valuable information that will enhance the mission of prevention. Prevention, obviously, is something that we have come to understand as a necessity, not an option. For so long, much of our criminal-justice system relied on prosecution as a strategy for prevention. But on September the 11th, when around 3,000 people died, and the 19 specific perpetrators of the acts were extinguished in the commission of the crime, we learned that relying on prosecution was not a very effective way to try and deter. For those who seek to extinguish themselves in the commission of a crime, prosecution is not a potential at all.

And prevention becomes a necessary strategy and one which results in real justice for real justice is not the remediation of criminal behavior; real justice is the absence of criminal behavior. And working together as law enforcement officials, we can effect the absence of criminal behavior. We can make that

possible through prevention.

The Department of Justice's COPS Office, for example, has given \$8.6 billion to communities to add community police officers, enhance crime-fighting technology, support crime prevention initiatives and provide training and technical assistance. In addition, more than a 173,000 law enforcement personnel and community members have been trained in community policing through the COPS nationwide network of Regional Community Policing Institutes. And these have been successful in reducing crime, in preventing crime, reducing the incidence of breaches of personal and community security all across the United States.

COPS also provides resources that reflect our national priority of terrorism prevention. For example, COPS-funded anti-terrorism training programs have come into existence. One in particular, at Wichita State University, came in response to an overwhelming demand in the wake of the September 11th attack. The program addressed issues of assessing possible terrorist targets, identifying those who might be involved in terrorist acts, and developing and sharing law enforcement intelligence on these issues. Working with experts in the law enforcement and intelligence communities, the Wichita Regional Community Policing Institute was able to compile a collection of anti-terrorism resources that now is being made available to law enforcement agencies all across America.

But the responsibility to protect our communities does not reside solely with law enforcement. It rests, as I've said before, with every American citizen. Federal law enforcement cannot be omnipresent. State and local law enforcement cannot be omnipresent. But the citizens of America can extend our presence significantly by their participation. Force multiplication and force extension is the great opportunity that we have that becomes a reality when citizens participate. We depend, of course, on state and local law enforcement as the very touchstone, the hands and feet, the eyes and ears, the feet on the street, for real law enforcement in America. But you, of course, must depend on citizens who work with you, walk with you, talk with you, sometimes ride with you. I've had the privilege of riding in the cars, and I've had the privilege of riding on the bicycles, as well as walking the beats on the streets. It makes a difference when the citizens join in.

Justice Department remains committed to doing everything we can to help you -- to help you do what you do best, and that's to mobilize that force extending capacity of citizen involvement. We've taken steps to engage everyday citizens as active partners with state and local law enforcement, as well, as partnering with them in the federal law enforcement arena.

Earlier this year, President George W. Bush announced the creation of the USA Freedom Corps and urged all Americans to devote substantial amounts of time to serving our communities. Under the superb direction of John Bridgeland, the Freedom Corps offers meaningful service opportunities to Americans of all ages. Citizen Corps, which is a component of the Freedom Corps, includes several programs that focus on citizen participation in community policing.

Recently I had the pleasure of launching one such program just across the Potomac Rive in Alexandria, Virginia. This national initiative, called Volunteers in Police Services, assists state and local law enforcement agencies by increasing the number of enforcement volunteers to help perform non-sworn duties, allowing officers to stay on the front lines - in their communities - where they're needed most to meet the primary objective, that of preventing criminal activity.

And several months ago, we announced a Citizen Corps expansion of another law enforcement initiative, the Neighborhood Watch Program. Our goal is to double the number of neighborhood watch programs and to educate citizens about how to participate in the protection of their own communities and the prevention of hazards to their own safety. The Justice Department partnered with the National Crime Prevention Council to produce a citizens' preparedness guide, which trains citizens to recognize the signals of potential terrorist activity and to know how to report that information. Understanding what kinds of activities are precursors to terrorist acts and incidents enables individuals to be alert to those kinds of activities.

That's why the Justice Department is more and more concerned about integrating our law enforcement effort through state and local police agencies, including the sharing of intelligence so that not only can intelligence come from the national government to the local level, but those things that are important and happening at the local level can be recognized, detected, understood and then moved back up through the levels to become a part of the picture assembled here in Washington.

Now the Volunteers in Police Services and Neighborhood Watch examples are just two of the successful community policing programs that are guided by the principle of prevention and are nurtured by a strong partnership between law enforcement and the citizens that law enforcement serves.

Our recent reforms at the Federal Bureau of Investigation reflect this same principle. The FBI mission is now focused on the proactive terrorism prevention opportunity, and that's more

deeply rooted in our local communities. It's done so on the theory that FBI agents, just like local policemen, must know their communities to more effectively prevent terrorism. As a result, I have authorized that agents are now able to attend and observe public events just like any member of the public might and as many law enforcement agency individuals have been able to historically. And Special Agents in Charge of field offices have been given greater flexibility to evaluate the problems specific to their communities and to act to solve them.

This is a recognition on our part of the clear truth that frequently those at the local level will have a much better understanding of activities at the local level which merit our inspection and observation than will those of us who may be a thousand or more miles away in Washington.

Cooperation and coordination between law enforcement agencies and communities are vital to achieving our mission of prevention. President Bush has recognized this and has called for the creation of the Department of Homeland Security. The Department of Justice will work with the Department of Homeland Security and state and local law enforcement in the war on terrorism. We will all be team members in achieving this important national objective.

And make no mistake about it, we recognize that the cooperation is a two-way street. Just as we are seeking to open new channels of information sharing from state and local law enforcement, we must ensure that appropriate intelligence flows from the federal agencies to our partners in the states and local communities as well.

Today, all of the men and women of law enforcement - be they federal, state or local - are called upon as never before to defend our nation, our citizens, and the values that America represents. The terrorist rejects freedom because he understands that freedom will never bring the world to the place where he wants it. He attacks freedom because if people are left free to make their own choices, they choose against him and against terror. And so we are defending the value of freedom, that chemistry which provides that each of us reaches the maximum of our potential because we live in liberty.

The number one priority for the Department of Justice is to detect and prevent terrorism, to disrupt it, to make it impossible. But we understand that we are incapable of achieving that objective without help. And your help is very important to this objective.

The genius of America has resided and will continue to

reside in our cities and towns and local communities. Today, the key to America's homeland security is in the good hands of the cities and towns of America's homeland, and we will cooperate with and work with each of you to make sure that the homeland remains safe. History has put before us a great challenge, ensuring that the government of the people, by the people and for the people does not perish from the earth. And without faith in the compassion and the good sense of the citizens we serve, we will not succeed. But if we have that faith in the compassion and good sense of the citizens we serve, and if we involve them, we will not fail.

I want to thank you for being here. I want to thank you for your leadership. I want to thank you for being a partner, for understanding that we can literally extend the security of the United States of America and extend the forces that we represent by involving citizens in securing this great land and its liberty, for which we thank God. God bless you. God bless the United States of America.