

REMARKS
OF
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OFFICE OF JUSTICE PROGRAMS
AT THE
NATIONAL FORUM ON YOUTH VIOLENCE PREVENTION
SUMMIT ON PREVENTING YOUTH VIOLENCE
ON
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WASHINGTON, DC

Thank you, Theron. I appreciate that introduction.

I'm delighted to see everyone – and thrilled to join our distinguished speakers this morning. It's an honor to have them with us today, and I look forward to introducing them in a few moments.

Before I do, I want to take just a minute to thank those who've made this summit possible. Many were involved – too many to name – but I have to single out three people: Thomas Abt and Theron Pride of my staff, and Eugene Schneeberg, Director of the Justice Department's Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships. They've helped lead the National Forum on Youth Violence Prevention from the beginning, and they've done such an outstanding job bringing in partners from across the federal government, and from across the country. This effort would not have come so far, so fast, without their guidance. Thank you, gentlemen.

I also want to thank my colleague Melodee Hanes, Acting Administrator of our Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, and her wonderful staff. They were also intimately involved in planning this Summit, and they've done a fabulous job helping to lead our work on the Forum.

Let me also call out Sue Badeau and Dr. William Bell from Casey Family Programs. The Casey staff continue to remind us of the importance of engaging youth and families. Thanks to their work, we've been able to involve more young people in our efforts – as you can see by looking around the room. Their attendance here – and their involvement in the Forum – is terrific.

Next, I'd like to thank our friends from the private sector. Target, in particular, has taken a very active role in the Forum. Target has been a model partner, and has really shown how business can advance our efforts to serve youth. We very much appreciate their involvement.

I also want to recognize our federal partners – both within and outside the Department of Justice, and on Capitol Hill. As you can see, the commitment to this effort runs to the highest levels. And behind each of these leaders is a whole host of dedicated staff working hard to make our vision a reality.

And finally – and most importantly – I want to say “thank you” to those of you from the local level. We in the Obama Administration know that meeting these challenges ultimately depends on the commitment you make and the actions you take. You've shown you're willing to take the difficult steps necessary to get the job done, and we're grateful for your dedication.

So, why are we here? What's so important that cabinet-level leaders, White House officials, distinguished Members of Congress and staff, mayors, community and faith-based leaders, and representatives from the private sector have chosen to be here today? After all, crime rates – on the whole – continue to decline in most American communities. Why the concern?

The concern is the statistics don't tell the full story. The fact is, some cities – and in particular, certain communities within those cities – are seeing crime move in the opposite direction. In these neighborhoods, violence is a fact of life. And tragically, much of it is being committed by – and against – young people.

I don't need to tell anyone here what a difficult challenge youth violence is. You're all part of the Forum because you've seen the consequences of juvenile crime in your own communities. You understand how complex this issue is – and you know this is not a problem any of us can solve alone – especially in this tough fiscal climate.

But you also believe there's something we can do about it. You know that, by working together – by pooling our resources and ideas – we have the ability to reverse the tide of youth violence in our communities.

The National Forum on Youth Violence Prevention is helping us chart a path to success. By emphasizing partnerships, evidence-based and data-driven strategies, and a balanced approach, we've found a good formula for channeling our collective resolve. We'll hear, over these two days, how that approach is working in the six Forum sites. These cities have worked hard over the last 18 months to develop real plans and strategies to coordinate their youth violence prevention activities. We come together to hear about their progress on those plans.

But the work going on in the six cities is only the beginning. Our goal here is to expand this conversation nationally. We want to help communities across the country

that share these challenges to benefit from our momentum, and from the valuable lessons these cities have to offer. If you're not from one of the six Forum sites – and you're facing these problems – we want to involve you. Your experiences can be instructive for us, and I believe the knowledge and resources we've developed through this effort can be useful to you. Together, I think we can make a difference in our communities.

Without question, this work is not – and will not be – easy. Forging new paths rarely is. This is a long-term proposition. Results won't come overnight. But I'm certain that, if we remain focused on our goals, are willing to work through the challenges together, and remain committed to a better future for our kids, we'll emerge from this effort in a stronger and better place.

The hallmark of the Forum is partnership – across disciplines and across levels of government. I'm proud to be part of an Administration that values partnerships and whose leaders reflect that commitment in their words and actions. I'm really pleased – and honored – that six of those leaders are joining us today. Attorney General Holder, Secretary Sebelius, and Secretary Donovan are on the stage with me this morning, and we'll be joined later by Valerie Jarrett from the White House, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, and the Director of the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy, Gil Kerlikowske.

Our first speaker is my wonderful boss, the Attorney General. I've known Eric Holder since his days as U.S. Attorney in the 90s, where I saw first-hand his commitment to kids. He's never wavered in that commitment. As Deputy Attorney General in the Clinton Administration, he launched the Safe Start Initiative to address the problem of children exposed to violence. I was proud to work closely with him on that effort. He's continued – and heightened – his focus on this issue as Attorney General through his Defending Childhood Initiative.

He's been a champion of the Forum at the Department of Justice – and there are few issues that engage his interest and concern the way this one does. You only need a couple of minutes with him to understand just how strongly he feels about protecting kids.

We're lucky to have him leading the Department's efforts. Please welcome the Attorney General of the United States.

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