



**Remarks of Brad Buckles
Director, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco,
Firearms and Explosives
Project Safe Neighborhoods Conference
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Good morning! Paul, Thank you for that kind introduction. It is a great pleasure to be here, and to be addressing such a dedicated and distinguished audience.

As I hope you all know from working with us against gun crime, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives plays a key role in the President's Project Safe Neighborhoods program. This conference not only provides us with another opportunity to work with our partners in this effort and to mark PSN's achievements over the past year, but is significant in that ATF, as you heard the Attorney General describe yesterday, is now part of the Justice Department family. This conference marks the first public setting in which we are participating as an official member of the Justice team.

It was nice to hear Deputy Attorney General Thompson clarify yesterday that although our name has gotten longer with the addition of explosives to our name, we still intend to go by the initials "ATF." It took us the better part of thirty years to get the public to realize that the "B" was silent on the front of our initials. Hopefully, with yesterday's pronouncement, we can keep the "E" silent from the beginning.

Attorney General Ashcroft came to ATF Headquarters earlier this week, and he inspired all of us with the support and confidence he expressed for both the people and mission of ATF. He urged us to work even more closely with our colleagues in State and local law enforcement and with our now fellow members of the Department of Justice. All of us at ATF enthusiastically embrace our move to Justice and look forward to working closely with and under the outstanding leadership of Attorney General Ashcroft and Deputy Attorney General Thompson to help make America safer.

As part of the Justice Department, ATF is better positioned than ever to bring our expertise to bear on the criminal misuse of firearms and explosives, both in the battle being waged against terrorism and our comprehensive fight against violent crime. We have long recognized that working together, across agency lines, and across levels of law enforcement, produces greater results.

Noted automobile executive John Kettering of General Motors, in talking about how advances are made in his business, once observed that improvements and breakthroughs are the product of two things, brains and money, and the more brains you put to a problem the less money you need. In law enforcement, like business, we don't have an unlimited supply of money to commit to our efforts. Most of us are facing demands where we are being asked to do more with the same or even reduced resources. This is why it is more incumbent than ever that we focus on the "brains" component of Mr. Kettering's formula. We must work smarter and we must work together to achieve a maximum return on the public's investment. When I look around this room and see the finest minds in American law enforcement, I am convinced we are on the right path. PSN is as much a process as it is a program - a process for bringing, nationally and locally, the finest minds or "brains" together to design and implement effective violence reduction strategies.

In approaching this task it is useful to carefully define our mission. We should not define our mission simply in terms of enforcing laws or imprisoning offenders. Those are important, essential actions we must take, but they do not express our true goal. I would like to suggest instead that we define our mission as one designed to undermine a pervasive criminal culture of gun violence. I believe it is important to view it as a culture problem because cultural attitudes do not change easily. They only change in the face of persistent and prolonged pressure.

We know violence begets violence, and gun crime begets gun crime. Once the shooting begins in a community, we have seen what can only be described as an arms war. As more guns are in the hands of more criminals the level of violence grows. We have learned that simply prosecuting the murders and assaults themselves as they occur will never get us ahead of the game. We have to attack gun violence at its roots, and when possible, before the shootings occur. We must recognize that a gun in this criminal culture is power. A gun gives a gang member status. A gun provides protection from rival gangs. A gun can intimidate a victim. A gun can eliminate a witness.

To most criminals a gun is simply a valuable tool. As long as the value that gun provides outweighs the problems a gun is likely to bring, criminals will continue to seek out guns, and violence will continue unabated. To be successful, Project Safe Neighborhoods, in seeking to change the culture of gun violence, must seek to permanently change that equation. Our efforts must be to eliminate the value of the gun by exhibiting a relentless intolerance for gun crime, and show an equally predictable intolerance for illegal gun possession and a determination to utilize all analytical and technological tools that can link recovered guns to past crimes.

The threat must be real, and the penalties must be certain. We must use public information campaigns, outreach programs, and community involvement to spread the message. A gun must be seen not as a valuable, even essential tool, but be seen as a ticket to prison. Participation in the gun trafficking must not be allowed to be seen as a relatively risk-free way to make some easy money, but as conduct that will be systematically pursued and prosecuted.

We must target the most violent, but treat no gun crime as minor. We must imprison the armed criminal, but just as aggressively prosecute those who supply the arms. We must use the gun and its history against the criminal. Firearms tracing information can identify traffickers, and firearms ballistics technology can link shootings. That gun must come to be seen as a huge liability, not a valuable tool.

As the Attorney General announced yesterday, we will place new emphasis even on what might be seen as victimless gun crimes, like prohibited persons who lie on applications to buy a firearm,

so called "lying and trying" cases. All gun crime must be treated as serious.

Since PSN's kick-off in Columbia, South Carolina, last year, ATF has delivered PSN enforcement training to over 1400 law enforcement officers in partnership with the International Association of Chiefs of Police, the National Association of District Attorneys, the Department of Justice and the National Crime Prevention Council.

PSN is paying off:

- PSN is working in Seattle where we successfully prosecuted a firearms trafficker - a convicted felon and cocaine user with ties to the Hell's Angels. Suspected of trafficking hundreds of guns, he was caught with nine illegal firearms connected with various other crimes, including the murder of a 20-year-old.
- PSN is working in Miami where Miami police and ATF's HIDTA task force arrested seven suspects in a series of home invasion robberies, and in a related case where a firearm recovered from a routine traffic stop was linked to a murder just a month before through the use of ballistic technology.
- PSN is working in rural communities like Belcourt, North Dakota, where police and ATF agents shut down an armed meth lab operator.
- PSN is working in Boston where comprehensive crime gun tracing helped identify four individuals who were trafficking in firearms and narcotics from Georgia to Massachusetts. When they were arrested by DEA, State and local police, and ATF, they had 31 guns and \$10,000 in cash in their possession.

These are just a few examples of the success we, collectively, are having around the country in our effort to change the place of gun violence in our society. Because of these investigations and many others, and because of strong teamwork among law enforcement, gun crime is dropping and we are making a difference.

We are also using our partnerships to improve our prevention efforts through outreach in the communities. For example, ATF continues to expand our Gang Resistance Education and Training Program, otherwise known as GREAT. We are extending the curriculum to include families of participating children. The law enforcement officers trained by ATF take the GREAT message into classrooms and now have the opportunity to reach the families of children they teach. Parents and guardians can hear, firsthand, the message of GREAT - that saying "no" to gang violence and illegal firearms can offer our young people more choices in their lives. Last year, nearly 400,000 students completed the GREAT Program, and 727 State and local law enforcement officers were trained as GREAT instructors.

These are but some of the activities that are occurring around the country where ATF is working with its partners to promote Project Safe Neighborhoods.

We look forward to continuing our collaborative efforts and intensifying the great partnerships that we have developed to reduce gun crime. By taking a team approach, by relying on each other and focusing on our strengths, we can make our streets and our neighborhoods safer places to live.

In one sense, nothing we are doing is new. We have had Ceasefire, Triggerlock, and trafficking programs in the past - all with some degree of success. In the past, however, these projects were too often "owned" by one level of government or one agency. That made them difficult to sustain. PSN has demonstrated that these same strategies can achieve new energy and strength by

having "buy-in" from all partners and by including them within more comprehensive plans.

PSN provides the framework for the sustained effort that is needed to change the culture of gun violence that plagues so many communities. To be successful we must be relentless and predictable, we must use public information campaigns to spread the word gun crimes will not be tolerated. As my friend Rick Cook, head of the Kansas City Crime Commission put it, "we must tell them what we are going to do, we must do it, and we must tell them we did it."

We must also combine these efforts with community outreach and youth programs that can offer a better way out for the next generation of potential shooters. Building and sustaining your PSN project in this way will save lives today and save us from losing another generation of youth to crime and prisons. After all, our ultimate goal is not to put more people in prison. Our ultimate goal is to change behavior and return hope and opportunity to troubled neighborhoods so that the younger brothers and sisters and sons and daughters of today's criminals will have a different path to follow.

Thank you all for your service to your communities and to America.

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