



# Department of Justice

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ADDRESS BY

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before the

WASHINGTON CITIZENS COUNCIL  
of the  
NATIONAL COUNCIL ON CRIME AND DELINQUENCY

Seattle, Washington

July 10, 1967

It was twenty five hundred years ago that Ezekiel wrote "the land is full of bloody crimes and the city is full of violence." In 1910, an American author asserted that "crime, especially its more violent forms and among the young, is increasing steadily and is threatening to bankrupt the nation." In 1929, Herbert Hoover identified the most malign danger facing America as "disregard and disobedience of law." In 1967, President Johnson's Crime Commission found that "the existence of crime, the talk about crime, the reports of crime and the fear of crime have eroded the basic quality of life of many Americans."

Thus do we recall that ours is not the first time there has been concern about crime. Thus do we see that crime does not yield to easy and permanent solutions. From these two lessons we can draw the wisdom and strength necessary to fashion a comprehensive strategy to control crime in America.

Our agencies of criminal justice represent society in its relations with the lawless. They can bring a higher level of public safety through their own perfection. This will require definitive planning. History can tell us little about law enforcement needs of the future. A renaissance of awareness and commitment is required. We must disentrall ourselves from the dogmas of the quiet past to think anew and act anew. Urbanization, population explosion, science and technology are causing sweeping and accelerating change.

The renaissance has begun. It is reflected in a growing commitment of resources to the tasks of law enforcement and criminal justice by the federal government, the states and municipalities, and the people. It is reflected in the programs of the National Council of Crime and Delinquency and its Washington Citizens Council, in the Safe Streets and Crime Control Act proposed by President Johnson, in the penetrating study by the President's Crime Commission, in the increasing vitality of state and local governments in criminal justice, and in the enlightened concern of citizens.

The renaissance will be stimulated by the Crime Control Act which is based on the urgent need for more resources, better applied, to improve the estate of criminal justice in America. That the promise of the Act can be attained is demonstrated by current developments on the state and local levels--the expanding use of modern techniques, the formation of state crime commissions, the unification of the instruments of criminal justice, the new concern for such aspects of law enforcement as police-community relations, the revisions of criminal and penal codes. Many of these endeavors, including several in Washington state, such as the excellent work release program of the King County Sheriff's Department, have been supported by the two-year-old Law Enforcement Assistance Act, the forerunner of the Crime Control Act.

It is sometimes said that approaches being stressed and methods being tested represent a "soft" attitude which cannot cope with crime. The alternative suggested is to "get tough." It is not always clear what this means for there are at least two definitions of the word "tough" that could be applied. One is "unruly or vicious, rowdyish, ruffianly" and the other is "strength arising from a texture or spirit that is firm and unyielding."

Using the second definition the actions contemplated by the Crime Control Act represent the toughest course yet taken in the fight against crime.

It is certainly not tough to stick with the 19th Century techniques so prevalent today, or to deal only with the surface symptoms of crime while neglecting its deeper roots or to deny the need for more resources for all agencies of criminal justice. It is not tough to divert attention from the real problems by criticizing the courts as if they changed human nature or caused crime. Nor is it tough to panic. Alarm and crisis do not produce wisdom, effectiveness or efficiency, and our circumstances require all three.

It is not easy to be tough. Discomfort always results when long-established practices are scrutinized and changed--even more so when so rigid an area as criminal justice is challenged to do better. But tough we must be, in a meaningful and effective manner.

This will require a vast improvement in the capability of law enforcement. For today only one in four serious crimes reported to police are solved. And less than half of all crimes and in areas perhaps as few as ten percent are even reported. What could be more meaningful to the public safety than upgrading law enforcement so that more crimes are discovered and solved, and more violators assured firm, sure, speedy justice?

There is no easy way--only hard, relentless, comprehensive improvement.

To the service we must bring the best and most dedicated talents among us. These we must train and perfect. We must bring out the best in all who serve. The direct impact of police, judges and corrections officers on the well being of each of us increases annually. We cannot afford less than the best.

We must engage in a continuing conversation--a free interchange of experience. Effective coordination among all agencies is necessary and research and development should be available for every criminal justice need.

It requires toughness too, to recognize many of our jails and prisons for what they are: temporary cell-blocks which prepare inmates for further crime. Realism, not softness, demand that we move forward in corrections.

We are beginning to realize how much can be done. Four in five felons were first convicted of misdemeanors. If we can cut that rate of crime repetition in half as present experience tells us we can, then clearly corrections is the answer to a major part of our crime. It is a key to protecting society. Is it too tough for us because we know it will require many thousands of highly skilled and dedicated workers and will cost hundreds of millions more than we now spend? Because we have been soft in our commitment in corrections, we pay a heavy price in crime.

To be tough is to ask more, to be hospitable to new evidence, to see the relation of social reform to the control of crime and to ensure that there is a continuing and developing strategy tailored to our great diversity. It is to expand the scope of the whole effort to control crime.

Toughness must be evaluated by realism, by effectiveness, by its capacity to meet the challenge laid down by President Johnson to "arrest and then reverse" the trend toward lawlessness in America. By these tests, we will choose and find a safer America with respect for the rights of others in the hearts of its citizens.