



Department of Justice

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"A TIME TO ACT"

AN ADDRESS BY

JOHN N. MITCHELL
ATTORNEY GENERAL
OF THE UNITED STATES

BEFORE THE
METROPOLITAN WASHINGTON
COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

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Each of us can probably recite the statement attributed to Edmund Burke:

"All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing." Nowhere is this better applied than in the field of criminal justice.

I bring this up tonight not as an admonition, but by way of a compliment. In the Washington Metropolitan area, good men and good women have done something. The evil of crime has not triumphed.

In a large part of this region, crime is being reduced--not just slightly, but in the latest fiscal year, by more than 18 percent under the previous year. In the rest of the area, I firmly believe that the actions of good men and women will bring similar results in the future. This is the subject that I would like to discuss with you tonight.

First let me define the Federal Government's role in this area. We have a clear responsibility in the District of Columbia.

When things are going in the right direction--and I believe they are in the area of criminal justice--we can share, along with people like Mayor Washington and Police Chief Wilson, some of the credit. And you can be certain that, if things go wrongly, there are whole armies of critics who are very generous in making sure that we share the blame.

The situation is very different in those areas of Maryland and Virginia that are part of metropolitan Washington. There, law enforcement and prosecution of regular crime--street crime--comes under state and local laws. The Nixon Administration is especially committed to halting Federal invasion of state sovereignty, and I intend to keep applying this policy in the field of criminal justice.

However, as a vital corollary, the Nixon Administration is also committed to strengthening the ability of the states to solve their own problems. As you know, this is largely a question of funds. Again speaking of criminal justice, this very need is served by the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, a part of the United States Department of Justice.

There has been some feeling that LEAA has allocated too many funds to the District of Columbia and not enough to the suburbs. I would like to address myself to this concern for just a moment.

By law, 85 percent of LEAA funds must be allocated in block grants to the states, and the District of Columbia is considered to be in that category. Only 15 percent may be allocated directly to local agencies throughout the country in discretionary grants. This is one reason why the comparison between the District of Columbia and the suburbs may seem out of balance. Another is that discretionary grants must be compatible with state plans, and not all local discretionary proposals have met this criterion. Even so, five discretionary grants were made to suburban Washington jurisdictions in fiscal 1971. In addition, some of the needs expressed in local discretionary proposals have been or are being met through the block grants to the states, and through other discretionary grants to the State Planning Agencies.

I would like to add that LEAA's total budget continues to rise very decidedly from year to year. Consistent with the comparable needs of other localities throughout the country, we certainly intend to expand the LEAA support to suburban Washington.

Second, crime has continued to rise in the suburbs. In figures just gathered by the FBI, crime in the first six months of 1971 dropped 16 percent in the District of Columbia from that in the first six months of 1970, while in the suburbs it increased an average of 7 percent.

It is suggested that criminals have simply transferred their activity outside the District, with the implication that we have really accomplished little, overall. However, studies show that, while there is mobility among some criminals, it works in all directions, not just outward from D. C. Actually, crime appears to have risen in the suburbs of Washington at a slightly lower rate than in the rest of the country.

However, no matter what its rate of increase, it must certainly spur us on to new countermeasures. To find such countermeasures we can search in three directions--what has been done successfully in the metropolitan region, what has been done successfully in the District of Columbia, and what has been done successfully in other American cities.

First, within the Council of Governments, an important step was taken last January with formation of the Police Mutual Aid Agreement, covering civil disturbances and natural disasters. There

is also a regional drug education program. There are other fields in which this kind of cooperation could be applied.

For example, BNDD has for some time urged the localities in this area to form a Metropolitan Enforcement Group. By this means, equipment, intelligence systems, and undercover agents can be shared. Since fiscal 1970, a means of funding such a program has been available from LEAA, and discretionary grants have funded successful programs in many other cities. I am pleased that a similar proposal for a narcotics task force was recommended at the recent Beltway Crime Conference. You may be assured of Justice Department cooperation in establishing such an organization.

Now, where cooperative efforts require LEAA funds, it has been claimed that it is too difficult to get agreement among the various parties involved. I would point out, however, that some multistate LEAA programs are alive and well and working nicely in other parts of the country. In New England, as an example, there is a six-state LEAA grant in operation for organized crime intelligence and prosecution. Less than two weeks ago the State Planning Agencies of Maryland, Virginia and the District of Columbia signed an agreement

to coordinate criminal justice planning efforts. Among other things, they agreed to consider the recommendations of the recent Beltway Crime Conference. Those recommendations, in turn, called for a number of steps to combine efforts and thus to increase effectiveness and decrease cost. The SPA's also agreed to explore with LEAA the possible need for a special discretionary grant fund against interjurisdictional crime in the metropolitan area. This is in line with LEAA's plans to direct its discretionary grants to fewer but larger programs that will have a real impact in a criminal justice field, and often in a regional framework. So I believe the situation in this area is today much more conducive to cooperation than it ever was before.

Next, what can we learn from the District of Columbia? Its success is generally attributed to the following steps:

An increase in manpower for police, prosecutors, judges and court staffs.

Installation of bright street lighting in high crime areas.

New laws and procedures to help in gathering evidence, to speed up

the trial process, to reform and reorganize the courts.

Improved and expanded treatment for drug addicts.

And perhaps most important, the kind of strong support from the President of the United States that builds morale and generates public cooperation.

These have worked for the District of Columbia, and while the situation is different in each community, I believe most of them would be worth serious consideration by the Governments represented in this council. And in some instances, such as drug treatment, I would suggest that funds might be saved by a regional approach.

Finally, what do other cities tell us about their successes?

In the first quarter of 1971, crime dropped in 60 American cities of over 100,000 population. The police chiefs of these cities were among those attending a recent conference on crime reduction, at my invitation. The object was to pool our experiences to see what new approaches would be successful. Here are some of the concepts that might be applicable to metropolitan Washington:

One, more regionalization of certain police functions, such as training, data processing, centralized crime laboratories, and detective forces. This certainly confirms and extends the direction in which we are already going.

Two, more use of auxiliary police to handle public service duties, such as protecting schools and controlling traffic. This frees more highly trained, professional officers for the strict law enforcement functions.

Three, opening more opportunities for minority employment in law enforcement. Besides the obvious fairness of this concept, I believe it is essential in keeping law enforcement from being blunted by any racial issue.

Four, more visible support for law enforcement by Government officials at all levels, by political parties, and by the news media. This can go a long way in generating greater public cooperation in bringing criminals to justice.

These are some of the highlights to be considered. The recent Beltway Crime Conference proposed others. My overwhelming feeling at this point is that we have now gone past the stage of conferring with each other and comparing notes. This was an essential step, but the time has come for the individual jurisdictions and the Council of Governments to take up the proposals that have come out of that initial stage. To paraphrase the prophet, there is a time to confer, and a time to act. Now is the time to act.

In urging our fellow jurisdictions to move forward in this manner, I would like to point out that whether the crime figures are going up or down, those figures represent real-life suffering, real-life victims, real-life offenders who need correcting. We must go about our work with a sense of urgency.

Nor can I hold out any quick and easy solutions which, once adopted, can enable us to relax. The battle against crime is not a stop-and-go affair. Having started with a quotation from Edmund Burke, I would like to close with another from him that is less known, but even more to the point for all of us: "He trespasses against his duty who sleeps upon his watch, as well as he that goes over to the enemy."

I believe that the good men and the good women of the Council of Governments realize this full well, and that they will continue to do not just something, but everything humanly possible.