



Department of Justice

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ADDRESS BY ATTORNEY GENERAL ROBERT F. KENNEDY
CONFERENCE ON CRIME PREVENTION IN CALIFORNIA

LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA, MARCH 24, 1962

Mr. Attorney General, I am grateful for your invitation to be here today. I consider this a most important meeting,--one well worth all the effort you made to bring it about. And I congratulate Town Hall, the California State Police Officers Association, and all the other organizations which have participated.

I am glad to be here because it does give me an opportunity to meet with you, to report to you on Federal law enforcement efforts and to pay my respects to you for the contributions you are making to strengthen law enforcement in our country. I particularly want to pay my respects to Attorney General Mosk who has done an outstanding job. He has an enviable record and I congratulate him and his associates on the work they have done.

Over the last eleven years, I have been in contact almost continually with law enforcement officers, and I have come to have great respect for them--for their skill, for their devotion to duty, and their willingness to undertake a job that is difficult at best, often dangerous and frequently unpleasant.

Since becoming Attorney General, I have become quite aware that the job of law enforcement is not getting any easier in this country. It is, in fact, becoming more difficult.

However, as I participate in meetings in the department of justice and hear reports from our attorneys and investigators about the power and activities of organized crime and racketeering around the country, I would become pessimistic about the future were it not that I can see we have made considerable progress toward bringing this cancer under control.

And I am also greatly encouraged by conferences such as this one, with so many people in attendance who can make a major difference in whether organized crime and racketeering are brought under control.

I must say that while I am encouraged by the progress made, I have no illusions that the battle is won. We have just started and this is going to be a long struggle which must be pressed with great vigor for several years. But a good start has been made and that is of major significance.

In the last month, I have traveled around the world and have talked with students, labor leaders, businessmen and officials. I encountered articulate, highly disciplined communists who shouted their hatred of the United States.

But for the most part, people everywhere look to us in spite of their lack of understanding of our economic and social progress and our objectives as a people, and despite their occasional disappointments with what we do.

They have serious questions about our country and our way of life. But they have a tremendous amount of good will toward America and the American people, and an undefined respect not just for our power but for our ideals.

As the President said in his State of the Union Address:

"Our Nation is commissioned by history to be either an observer of freedom's failure or a cause of its success. Our overriding obligation in the months ahead is to fulfill the world's hopes by fulfilling our own faith.

"And," the President concluded, "that task must begin at home."

Applying that to law enforcement, let me point out that our long-term objective obviously is to create an international system of law and order, so that a peaceful and productive society can thrive throughout the world.

However, we cannot hope to see the rule of law grow and flourish in other countries if it is not maintained and upheld here at home. In other words, we cannot be the leaders in this field unless we have the will and the determination to meet our responsibilities to live by the rule of law.

Organized crime, of course, poses one of the greatest threats to the rule of law. Unless we combat it successfully, not only will respect for the law be eroded, but our determination and ability to defend our basic freedoms will be greatly weakened.

Organized crime has become big business. It knows no state lines. It drains off millions of dollars of our national wealth, infects legitimate businesses, labor unions, sports, and most importantly, corrupts public officials.

The upsurge in the crime rate cannot be explained away by our population growth for crime has been increasing four times faster than the population. I believe the explanation can be found primarily in the fact that disregard for the law is tolerated too much at every level of our society--giving rise to cynicism and the cheap, false philosophy that everything is a racket.

So, it is not just the physical harm and financial loss that the criminal element inflicts on this nation that is of major concern, but what the racketeers and hoodlums are doing to our moral fiber. Ninety per cent of the major racketeers would be out of business by the end of this year, if the ordinary citizen, the businessman, the lawyer, the union official and the public authority stood up to be counted and refused to participate.

In January 1961 the Department of Justice began to make a major effort against organized crime and racketeering.

We started by taking steps to coordinate all Federal law enforcement investigations and to work wherever possible in this endeavor with local police.

We began to pool information in the files of Federal and local law enforcement agencies about racketeers.

We submitted eight bills to Congress which were aimed primarily at giving the Justice Department authority for the first time to deal with gambling activity and its huge profits which finance most other criminal operations throughout the country.

An intelligence unit was formed within the Department to pool information and intelligence from some 25 Federal investigative agencies and many local law enforcement officers. It now is getting data on a day-to-day basis on almost 1,000 persons who are active in or associated with racketeering enterprises.

The activities of Federal investigative agencies also are being coordinated so that there is no duplication and that all our resources are thrown into this battle in the most effective way.

In this connection, we have had close coordination with law enforcement agencies in southern California. The Department of Justice frequently is in contact with the Los Angeles Police as well as the Attorney General's office and others.

The Special Prosecutions Unit in the Office of the United States Attorney Francis Whelan has joined the Law Enforcement Information Unit which operates throughout the West. Copies of L.E.I.U. file cards and pictures have been sent to our Central Intelligence Unit in Washington and this exchange of information has proved useful.

Recently, officials in an eastern locality were seeking information about persons who were establishing a business there. On the basis of personal contact with Captain James Hamilton, they asked if he had any knowledge of these individuals. He asked our Intelligence Section in Washington and from our files we were able to advise that one of these persons had participated in a labor union extortion scheme.

Another recent example occurred when a leading New York City hoodlum made a sudden trip to California. As soon as he entered this State he was spotted and the information was made known to Washington by LEIU.

The recent conviction of Frankie Carbo on extortion charges resulted from excellent coordination between Federal and local agencies. This case was developed originally by local authorities. The Los Angeles Police, after carrying their investigation as far as they could, called a conference attended by Federal and state officials.

After a decision was reached to bring Federal action, the evidence compiled by local agencies was the major factor in preparation of the case. Members of the Los Angeles Police Department were witnesses, and the Police Department continued to render substantial assistance throughout the trial.

A similar example of local and Federal cooperation occurred in the successful tax prosecution of Mickey Cohen. Police departments in Chicago and New York, as well as in California, played a part in putting the pieces of the jigsaw together.

The Los Angeles Police Department and the county sheriff's office were of considerable assistance during the trial and at times the California Highway Patrol and the San Diego Police Department gave unusually fine cooperation.

These two cases are among the most important convictions obtained during the past year. There have been others around the country and I can tell you that they have made a major difference.

The underworld is now well aware of what is happening. Reports indicate that the major racketeers and hoodlums are uneasy. They are worried and several months ago the head of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police said that Canada must take steps to cope with an influx of American racketeers shifting their operations to Canada because of our efforts.

Five of the eight bills which we submitted to Congress were enacted with the help of both Republicans and Democrats. This is the most anti-crime legislation enacted since 1934.

In fact, between 1934 and last year, very little anti-crime legislation was enacted. As a result the Federal Government was attempting to deal with organized crime and racketeering with laws which were effective in the days of Al Capone and John Dillinger.

Meanwhile, the racketeers had built vast illegal operations which reached across local, state and even national boundaries.

So, these new bills are welcome weapons. They prohibit

- (1) Interstate transmission of bets or wagers by wire or telephone;
- (2) Interstate transportation of gambling equipment--this statute was broadly defined by Congress to include numbers racket tickets and sports betting slips; and
- (3) Interstate travel to promote or engage in illegal business enterprises.

These laws were signed by the President on September 13 and had almost an immediate effect on the gambling community. The majority of the Nation's leading race wire services closed down or curtailed operations. Betting on football contests dropped off drastically as compared with 1960. Wagering virtually ceased at a major gambling center--Newport, Kentucky.

The laws have been on the books now for six months. Ten wire services have either closed down or limited their operations to intrastate activity.

Grand juries around the country have returned indictments against a total of 57 defendants who were engaged in the numbers racket, large-scale dice games, football pool tickets and bookie or racing scratch-sheet operations.

The FBI reported a few days ago that it has opened more than 2700 cases for investigation under the new laws.

Our other three bills are pending in the House of Representatives after passing the Senate last summer. I am hopeful that they will be enacted before Congress adjourns.

They would give greater protection to witnesses and others who may be cooperating with the Government in an investigation; revitalize the law banning interstate shipment of gambling machines and give immunity for certain witnesses in labor-management racketeering cases.

In my opinion, all three of these bills will be necessary if we are to maintain the pressure on the racketeers and hoodlums and keep pace with the growing crime rate.

I would appreciate any support which you would see fit to give these bills.

This has been a very brief rundown on what we are doing in one area of the fight against crime. We also are making a major drive on racketeers who corrupt public officials. Our jurisdiction obviously is limited but this is an area that is receiving top priority.

As an example of our efforts in this field, indictments were returned in Newport, Kentucky, against the Chief of Police, the operators of a gambling establishment, two police officers and a lawyer for conspiring to frame a candidate for sheriff who pledged a clean up of vice.

Active investigations of public officials are going on in other communities across the country. A former district attorney of a major county in Indiana recently was convicted of income tax evasion.

We also are making a major effort to eliminate or curtail sources of narcotics and to prosecute importers and dealers. The passage of the Narcotics Control Act in 1956 committed the Federal Government to intensive activity in the narcotics field with a policy of severe mandatory penalties for violators.

We are hopeful that the new narcotics laws enacted last year by the California Legislature will have a marked effect in dealing with this major problem here. The passage of this far-reaching and progressive legislation and the continuing and increased cooperation between Federal, state and Mexican authorities give promise that the narcotics traffic will be curbed in California.

Yesterday, I visited the Federal Correctional Institution at Lompoc which, as you know, is a prison for youthful offenders. And I would like to tell you just briefly what the Federal Government is doing to meet its responsibilities in reducing juvenile delinquency and youth crime.

The continuing rise of juvenile delinquency and youth crime unquestionably is one of the greatest problems facing the American people.

Essentially, this is a local problem, but the Federal Government can and is giving greater leadership through President Kennedy's committee which will supervise expenditure of thirty million dollars appropriated by Congress to aid and assist local programs during the next three years.

The Department of Justice is trying out a new plan in Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York to help more young Federal prisoners readjust successfully to civilian life.

So-called "halfway houses" were established last fall. The youths go there for a month or two prior to their release to receive special counseling and aid in obtaining jobs.

The probation officers in all three cities report that the "graduates" of these guidance centers return to society with a much more positive and realistic attitude than do youths released directly from an institution.

I visited the half-way house in Los Angeles just before it opened. It had been renovated by prisoners from Terminal Island. These men worked with unusual zeal to get the job finished in a week. Many expressed the wish that such a center had been in existence when they were young.

In closing, let me tell you how important I think your work is to the future of our country. History knows no inevitability, except as men surrender to their own fears of the future. And a free nation, united behind strong leadership, has no fear. It faces the unknown with anticipation and with faith. And our history testifies to this faith.

We were born in revolution and nurtured by struggle and war. Only a tough and purposeful people could build a great nation in an uncharted wilderness. Only people who value intelligence and honest exchange of ideas could build a system of government which preserved individual liberty while achieving the greatest prosperity the world has ever seen. But, as Somerset Maugham once said:

"If a nation values anything more than freedom, it will lose its freedom; and the irony of it is that if it is comfort or money that it values more, it will lose that too."

So, the work you are doing in enforcing the law and in aiding young people is vital. Our responsibilities as law enforcement officers are clear and though the problems of organized crime and juvenile delinquency are very great, I am confident that we will meet our responsibilities and conquer our problems, and that we will be successful.

And so I salute you and I wish you well.