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REMARKS  
OF  
THE HONORABLE GRIFFIN B. BELL  
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES

BEFORE

THE NATIONAL DISTRICT ATTORNEYS ASSOCIATION

11:30 a.m.  
TUESDAY, MARCH 15, 1977  
TOWN AND COUNTRY HOTEL  
SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA



1 Attorney General to repair to the Watergate.

2 The real reason we're moving there is we found a  
3 nice apartment. And there's a lot of nice people living  
4 there.

5 But the press could hardly believe that, though,  
6 about a month ago when I told them I was going to move to  
7 the Watergate. It seems to shock people  
8 when I say that.

9 I told another story over there at the other  
10 meeting which I think you can appreciate. I once heard a defini-  
11 tion of confession of avoidance. I've recalled it a number of  
12 times since I've been Attorney General. A man was charged  
13 with being drunk and setting a bed on fire. And he said  
14 he pled guilty to being drunk, but the bed was on fire  
15 when he got in it.

16 [Laughter.]

17 ATTORNEY GENERAL BELL: I claim that the Justice  
18 Department was on fire before I got there. I didn't get it  
19 in the shape it's in.

20 The things that I want to mention to you that I  
21 think you'll have particular interest in, is, number one,  
22 the fact that as Attorney General I perceive my duty to try  
23 to formulate a national policy on the delivery of justice,  
24 recognizing at the same time that 95 percent of all cases  
25 in America, civil and criminal, are tried in the state courts.

1           We have a dual system of government, and the law  
2 is not really enforced, the system of justice is not adequate,  
3 if we just look at it on the federal level. We have to  
4 look at the state and federal level.

5           So in that connection, I'm meeting with a lot  
6 of groups. I pledged that any group that wanted to see me  
7 could come to the Justice Department to see me. Some groups  
8 I'm asking to come. One is your group. I met with 21  
9 State Attorneys General a few days ago. I met with eight  
10 governors who are on a committee of the National Governors'  
11 Conference. I met with a group of federal  
12 U.S. Attorneys, federal prosecutors.

13           I asked the American Academy of Trial Lawyers this  
14 morning to give me a committee from their group. I've asked  
15 each one of these groups to name a committee to work with  
16 me. So together we can formulate and announce and hopefully  
17 implement a national system for the delivery of justice.

18           So I'll be looking forward to working with your group.  
19 I've met with you, and you've already appointed your committee.  
20 And I know that together we can make progress.

21           In that connection, as a part of the policy, we'll  
22 have to allocate, and reallocate to some extent, the resources  
23 that are available to run a system for the delivery of  
24 justice. You're getting some money from the federal level  
25 through the LEAA. All that will have to be examined. We'll

1 hopefully work out a system where the FBI works  
2 with the state prosecutors as well as the federal prosecutors.  
3 When they make a case now generally they take it to the  
4 U.S. Attorney's office. They keep what they call a declination  
5 statistic, reflecting the declination.

6 My own idea is that we're all in it together, and  
7 the FBI ought to take cases to the state prosecutors as  
8 well as the federal.

9 The same would go for the Drug Enforcement Agency.  
10 They would take cases to what I call both sets of  
11 court systems. We are going to also go heavy on fraud cases.  
12 The New York Times said  
13 I speak in plain language. Well, in South Georgia, if somebody  
14 steals from the government, it upsets people. We're going  
15 to try to stop any stealing from the government.

16 And around Washington, they don't call it stealing.  
17 They call it fraud. But it's the same to me. And that will  
18 include Medicare and Medicaid cases, whenever we get them  
19 from Medicaid at the federal levels. We'll help you when  
20 you have the Medicaid cases from the state level. We intend  
21 to look into the fraud in government contracts, and I'm  
22 told that there's a good area there to look into to.

23 The FBI will be taking more and more interest in  
24 this. It's hard to find accountants, but we'll hire lawyers,  
25 if we need to, and train them as accountants. You need to

1 be more than an accountant. You need to understand  
2 computer technology, data retrieval systems, that sort of  
3 thing. And if you're going to prosecute today, as you know  
4 as prosecutors, oftentimes in a complicated case they call it  
5 a paper chase around the Justice Department. The defendants  
6 maybe have more weapons and more tools than we have as pro-  
7 secutors. So we're going to get the FBI to where they're  
8 really skilled in that sort of prosecutorial effort.

9 A lot of people are interested in the illegal alien  
10 project. We have a committee working on that -- the Secretary  
11 of Labor and Chairman Rodino of the House Judicial Committee,  
12 and some of my people, and we'll report progress  
13 on that.

14 The drug problem is exacerbated by the fact that  
15 the border is open and the same thing that lets illegal  
16 aliens in -- a system where you have almost an open border --  
17 also allows for the introduction of more drugs into the coun-  
18 try. So if we do something about the border, we might at  
19 the same time do something about the drug problem and the  
20 illegal alien problem.

21 Whatever policy we come out with on the alien  
22 problem will be humane and compassionate. It will give  
23 credit to aliens who are in this country and who have built  
24 up some equity in our country. They've been here a long time,  
25 they're married and have families, jobs. They'd be allowed

1 to turn in and seek citizenship, but we must move forward.

2 I find in Washington that there are a lot of problems  
3 that have just been around, and the best thing to do with  
4 them is meet them, and move forward. I said something one  
5 day -- we had a lot of land mines around the Justice Depart-  
6 ment. I was afraid one would go off and kill me. And some-  
7 body said, it wouldn't be that bad, sometimes one will go off  
8 and you'll just lose an arm or a leg.

9 But there are a lot of land mines around there. My  
10 pledge is to take the Justice Department, reorganize it,  
11 depoliticize it, make it able to perform its mission, also  
12 at the same time formulating, as I said, a national policy  
13 on the delivery of justice. When I leave there I hope it  
14 will be a good deal better place and a better managed place  
15 than it was when I went there. I don't apologize for the  
16 Carter' administration's efforts to manage. People say that  
17 we may be losing sight of the good goals of the government  
18 because of management, but I say that the government has  
19 got in the shape it's in because it hasn't been managed.

20 We had goals and no management. There's nothing  
21 wrong, you don't need to apologize for having goals and mana-  
22 gement as long as the management is humane and adjusted and  
23 directed and will give us a chance to achieve some responsi-  
24 bility. That's what I say we're doing, and I think we are  
25 making some progress.