



Department of Justice

ADDRESS

OF

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

BEFORE THE

FBI NATIONAL ACADEMY

FRIDAY, JUNE 15, 1979
10:30 A.M.
QUANTICO, VIRGINIA

Let me congratulate you for successfully completing the rigorous course of the FBI National Academy. Your experiences here will benefit your departments -- and your communities -- for the rest of your careers.

The FBI and the Department of Justice place a high priority on cooperative programs with state and local law enforcement agencies.

Specific responsibilities differ, but we share a common goal -- a safer, more just society. As society grows more complex, we must rely on each other more and more.

Your main focus is on street crime -- one of the nation's most difficult problems. In a sense, you have a double burden -- an alarming number of crimes and a nagging public discontent that crime levels remain so high.

Except for financial assistance, the federal government has only a limited role in combatting street crime. Our resources are concentrated on crimes that frequently are beyond the grasp of a single police department.

In the past two and one-half years, strengthening federal anti-crime programs has been one of my chief priorities. I would like to discuss three of them with you today.

One is the work of the Public Integrity Section of the Criminal Division. It prosecutes corruption by public officials -- federal, state, and local. Since 1977, we have doubled the number of its attorneys and sharply focused its priorities.

Approximately half the Section's cases involve federal officials, the rest state and local. We are sometimes asked why states and localities cannot investigate these cases themselves.

The main problem is that they often lack tools the federal government has at its disposal -- immunity, investigative grand juries, racketeering and related statutes.

In addition, police departments devoting most of their attention to street crime often do not have the resources to conduct complex political corruption investigations.

Federal prosecutions at the state and local levels often have a twofold result: Corrupt public officials are sent to prison and reforms are then fashioned.

In one state, the Department successfully prosecuted a major official for stealing federal funds. The state promptly developed stringent new procedures designed to prevent future thefts.

Another benefit is that we now have one central office where corruption allegations may be made.

Before Attorney General Levi created the Public Integrity Section, there was no single place where such complaints of public corruption could be taken. Coordination often was poor and, I suspect, some promising cases were not pursued properly.

Another benefit is that more and more police are coming to us with corruption allegations, and the level of police cooperation with our investigations continues to rise.

This new program can benefit the country for years to come. Most public officials are honest, but those who are not will be found and prosecuted.

We are dedicated to this battle against public corruption. The results of our great emphasis on corruption cases is dramatically demonstrated by the statistics. In 1977, there were 507 public officials indicted. In 1978, it rose to 557. By comparison, the total in 1970 was just 63.

I do not think this increase reflects a growth in corruption. Rather, I believe it is the result of the federal effort, in cooperation with local authorities, to attack illegal acts of public officials.

The second program is that of the Organized Crime and Racketeering Section of the Criminal Division, which we have substantially expanded.

Organized crime's tentacles reach nationwide and into many industries and fields. More than any other type of crime, it requires the concentrated and coordinated enforcement efforts of the federal government. The Organized Crime Strike Forces continue to be one of our highest priorities. They consist of dedicated, experienced prosecutors who work closely with the FBI, other federal agencies, and, in many cases, local and state law enforcement officials.

We have added attorneys, created another strike force, and staffed six new field offices in major metropolitan centers.

The most significant step we have taken is to establish new investigative priorities. There is less emphasis now on the former strategy of pursuing isolated illegal acts by members of organized crime syndicates. Instead, the Department is developing sophisticated investigations into large-scale organized crime operations that affect significant economic segments of our communities.

Our objective is to cripple the illegal enterprises -- not only by convicting and incarcerating the principal participants but also by seeking forfeiture of the assets obtained illegally by the criminal syndicates.

Our primary targets are organized crime penetration of legitimate business, labor racketeering, and the corruption and obstruction of federal and state political and judicial systems.

No one should doubt the awesome costs the country pays because of organized crime activities -- corruption of business and labor, hidden costs for consumers, the debilitating effects on government.

It may not be possible to eliminate organized crime, but we can dramatically reduce its hold on major portions of the country's daily life.

Our new approach will bring greater and greater results. Organized crime enterprises will be broken or weakened. More top-level leaders will go to prison. We will show honest citizens that they do not have to knuckle under.

The third area I want to discuss is an unprecedented effort by the Department, which I approved in February, to combat fraud and white-collar crime.

The Criminal Division has set up economic crime units in six United States Attorneys' offices throughout the country, with a goal of having units in 27 to 30 offices.

They will ultimately be staffed by 150 Criminal Division attorneys to be paired with an equal number of assistant U.S. Attorneys. Their full range of priorities is still being developed, but we already have determined that one key objective is fraud in government programs.

These units also will focus on the most prevalent local white collar crimes. In one region, it could be arson for profit, in another bankruptcy fraud or frauds bilking large numbers of persons.

There are two unprecedented aspects to the units:

-- As it is now with public corruption, there will be one Federal office to receive all allegations of fraud in government programs.

-- We now have, in effect, an early warning system to discover patterns of fraud before they grow to national scandals.

Significant assistance will flow from this program to state and local enforcement agencies. Let me give you an example: Justice might uncover theft of Federal funds by local officials. Further digging might find unrelated violations of state laws -- such things as kickbacks or bid rigging. Those cases could be turned over to local police.

We will seek to concentrate on cases that have the greatest economic and social significance. We want to uncover not only corruption and theft but to find weaknesses in programs and procedures. And, by therapeutic changes in laws and administrative practices, to prevent new thefts of public funds.

Cases of fraud against the government have increased some 30 percent since 1976 -- and we believe that trend will continue.

Now a word about power: I have long realized that, more often than not, the wisest exercise of power is not to use it at all.

In law enforcement, personal power is enormous. And the situation is complicated by the fact that judgments often have to be made in the wink of an eye on how to use it. My advice is simply to be more aware of that power -- and more aware of the options in its use.

More criminals can be caught and sent to prison by law enforcement personnel who follow the law than by those who skirt the law in an effort to win convictions. Courts don't overturn convictions because proper procedures were followed.

Police are the most visible sign of the criminal justice system to the public -- and the public frequently evaluates the entire system through experiences with police.

By professionalism, civility, integrity, and restraint, law enforcement officers can significantly enhance support from the public. More than that, those very qualities may in fact reduce crime. Persons encountering fairness at every turn may be less likely to want to violate the law.

You have not chosen an easy profession. But you have chosen one that can be supremely rewarding. Thank you for your service to your local community and to our Nation. Congratulations and good luck.