



# Department of Justice

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ADDRESS BY ATTORNEY GENERAL ROBERT F. KENNEDY  
TO A JOINT MEETING OF THE  
KANAWHA COUNTY PARENT-TEACHERS COUNCIL  
AND  
MEMBERS OF ACTION FOR APPALACHIAN YOUTH, INC.  
CIVIC CENTER  
CHARLESTON, WEST VIRGINIA  
APRIL 29, 1964

Coming back to West Virginia is like coming back to an old home. My trip through Kanawha County today brought back memories that, after four years, are still fresh.

Standing in this very room in September of 1960, Senator John F. Kennedy declared that he was the only candidate for President who did not need a guide to get from Charleston to Beckley, and who knew that you spell Mullens, West Virginia, M-u-l-l-e-n-s.

All of us who walked your roads and met your people in the spring of 1960 learned something about the meaning of courage and determination. Senator Kennedy came to love this state and its people. He called it the state that refused to die: towns that wouldn't give up and proud men who could not find jobs but kept on looking.

After the West Virginia primary made possible my brother's nomination, he took the story of West Virginia to the nation.

He pledged that if he were elected, the American government would do more for West Virginia, and for every state where decent, able men are smothered by social and economic forces beyond their control. I believe that pledge was kept.

In the past three years we have seen the birth of new progress in West Virginia. The federal government has begun to meet its responsibilities to this state. A new partnership has been formed, aided by such legislation as the Manpower Development and Training Act, the Area Redevelopment Act, and the Juvenile Delinquency Act.

In fiscal 1963, the Department of Health, Education and Welfare contributed \$237 million for programs in child care, education, health and social security. The area Redevelopment Administration invested \$33 million in the future of West Virginia.

The Housing and Home Finance Agency put \$28 million into better housing for your people, and the Labor Department spent \$6 million on job training for West Virginians.

And West Virginia will benefit from another great national program when Congress approves President Johnson's war on poverty.

Of all these important undertakings, I have been most involved in the juvenile delinquency program. As chairman of the President's committee on Juvenile Delinquency, I have helped implement the Juvenile Delinquency Act of 1961, and I have become increasingly concerned about the complexity of the problems facing our youth, particularly the children of our urban and rural slums.

I know these problems are of vital concern to you, the members of Action for Appalachian Youth, and the Kanawha County Council of Parents and Teachers, and I would like to look back tonight on some of the things we have learned in the past three years.

We started with the belief that delinquency cannot be understood or dealt with by shock at its results, but rather with rational evaluation of its causes. And we began with the belief that we could not look to any single cause, because there are many: slum housing, youth unemployment, racial discrimination, inadequate schooling, broken homes--all the handicaps that combine to strip young people of any hope for their own futures in society.

As President Johnson observed in his message on Poverty to Congress:

"Worst of all, poverty means hopelessness for the young. The young men and women who grow up without a decent education in a broken home in a hostile and squalid environment in ill health or in the face of racial injustice, that young man or woman is often trapped in the life of poverty... He faces a mounting sense of despair which drains initiative and ambition and energy."

Our goal was to support a limited number of local demonstration projects which would show how hope could be restored, how delinquency can be fought effectively by being fought on many fronts--through simultaneous, cooperative efforts in job training, health, education, rehabilitation, recreation and social services.

No city was ready at that time to start such a program. So our immediate goal was to help willing communities develop the plan and marshal the resources necessary for action. As a result, we made preliminary grants to 16 cities, including Charleston, to draw up the plans for broad community youth programs. In short, we set out to help these communities learn how to begin.

This job of planning is hard work. There is no glory in it. But without planning, despite the best intentions, we continue with haphazard, fragmented efforts that waste good intentions, good work, money and, worst of all, the lives of our young people.

Thus, this planning period is the test of a community's resolve. Action for Appalachian Youth has been among the most successful projects, and no one

deserves more credit for this than Judge William J. Thompson, whose dedication to the cause of youth is unexcelled throughout the nation.

Today, all but a few of the 16 cities have come back to us with their action proposals. From them we have found five standards by which to measure the effectiveness of juvenile delinquency efforts.

The first standard, plainly, is the quality of the programs with which we set out. Our efforts should treat causes, not symptoms. They should be based on fact, not speculation. They should reach the poor who are the victims of the problem, not the middle-class.

Most important, the individual programs, whether in education, job training, recreation, probation, social work, or other fields, must work together.

The second requirement is capable professional leadership. The need is for men whose vision is not confined to one field of specialization, but who can see and act against total problems. This means men who see what must be done, can communicate these plans to the lay community, and can direct a staff to get the job done. Such professional talent, responsible to the community leadership, is imperative if good ideas are to become reality for the community.

The third need is for full cooperation between local institutions and social agencies. City, county, state, and private welfare agencies, the school system, the courts, the police, civic groups, churches -- all these have a vital role to play.

Clearly, this is an ideal. While these different groups share in a resolve to help youth, they also represent particular, sometimes differing interests and approaches. What one finds in the real world are friction, rivalry and misunderstanding.

Thus, a major function of the planning effort is to create an effective working relationship among these agencies, joined in the understanding that maximum results depend on maximum cooperation. Such cooperation is not simply desirable. It is essential. Our youth problems are too serious to permit us the luxury of fragmentation, discord and delay.

The fourth need is to involve the leaders of the target population in the program. We must plan with these people, not for them. We must seek out the leaders of the slum community or of the hollow and get their ideas and assistance.

In one city, a massive community improvement program has been snubbed by the very people it was meant to help. The program had the best of intentions. It had the involvement and support of public officials in the area. But the problem remained, and the reason was simple: the program was imposed from the outside.

We need to remember--and nowhere is this more true than in West Virginia--that to be without money is not to be without pride.

All of these factors are important, but the fifth factor is the most important of all: the commitment of the top level leadership of the community. I refer here to elected officials, and also to the high officials of business, labor and education. I am not talking about lip-service, but about a real commitment of time and money and influence.

No city can deal effectively with its major social problems without this high-level commitment. The most sensible plan and the most extensive efforts of hundreds of dedicated teachers, social workers and policemen will be thwarted unless they get money and moral support from those who make far reaching community decisions.

We have seen one city flounder because its mayor is not committed. In another city, rivalry between the city and county governments has crippled the program. Education and jobs are basic to preventing the problem, yet we have heard high school superintendents and corporation executives say they are not involved in the delinquency problem.

But in most communities, public officials have assumed their responsibilities and we have seen progress. Certainly we have seen this in Charleston, with the firm commitment of Judge Thompson, Senators Randolph and Byrd, Congressman Slack, Governor Barron, Mayor Shanklin and many, many others I see here tonight.

Indeed, we have seen all five basic elements of a successful program develop in Action for Appalachian Youth. Your project has completed the groundwork. Now it is in the action phase and is beginning to pick up speed.

Two of your major programs, neighborhood development and youth employment, are funded and in action. AAY is beginning to tap the reservoir of human resources available in Kanawha County. AAY's workers are carrying the concept of self-help into the city slums and rural hollows. Close ties have been established with community and state agencies. The working relationship between AAY and the Kanawha County School Board is of particular importance. The Community School program being planned by your school board, to keep schools open evenings and weekends to serve as community centers, is a creative beginning.

And, more important than even a specific program, is the foundation you have built for future community action. You know where you are and you know where you are going. The AAY program will face challenges as it moves ahead and it will need the support of every citizen. But you have given every indication that you will succeed.

You have the community support to carry out a youth program today--or an anti-poverty program tomorrow. The problems are easy to see and are identical. The solutions are obscure and enormously difficult.

But you in Charleston, working with AAY, have demonstrated that they are not impossible. Given the ingredients of resolute community action, working in partnership with federal assistance and stimulation, we can succeed.

Norman Podhoretz, the editor and writer, recently wrote: "In the past few years poverty has penetrated into the consciousness of middle-class America for the first time since the Depression."

To our credit as a nation, he is right. Today millions of Americans are concerned about dropouts, automation, migrant workers and pockets of poverty. I don't think people talked much about these things before the spring of 1960.

I think the turning point came when Senator Kennedy travelled up and down this state and felt the plight of many of its people. As a candidate, he turned the eyes of the nation on West Virginia. As President, he did everything in his power, as President Johnson is doing, to help the poor in this state and every state.

We can launch an all-out attack on poverty now because the American public understands the issues and the need for action. This war can be won if we, as citizens of West Virginia, or Washington, or America, give it our fullest support. Nothing is beyond the capacity of this nation when its people speak with a united voice.

President Kennedy expected a great deal from the people of West Virginia and he would be proud to know that a program like Action for Appalachian Youth has become a model for efforts to solve the problems of young people throughout the country.

And there can be no more important effort. Theodore Roosevelt wrote in 1910:

"The object of government is the welfare of the people. The material progress and prosperity of a nation are desirable chiefly so far as they lead to the moral and material welfare of all good citizens."

That is our goal today, as it has been throughout our history. All of you who invest your hours, your energy, and your interest in the young people of Kanawha County contribute to that goal. You have my warmest wishes in your work.