

ADDRESS

BY

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

AT THE DEDICATION CEREMONY
OF THE STATE COURT FACILITY

Warner Robins, Georgia
July 8, 1977

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P R O C E E D I N G S

ATTORNEY GENERAL BELL: -- others members of the judiciary, distinguished guests, a lot of old friends, family, and ladies and gentlemen:

It's a great pleasure for me to be back in Warner Robins after an absence of a number of years. I think it's safe to say that I'm the only Attorney General who was ever City Attorney of Warner Robins.

I know you're hot. I observe -- as Casey Stengel said, you can observe a lot by just watching. And I see that you're getting pretty hot.

President Carter's main plank in his platform is humaneness and compassion. So I'm going to make a very short speech to honor that plank in his platform.

This usually happens to me -- we have a speechwriting unit at the Justice Department, and they write speeches for me, and I rarely use them.

A lot of people have asked me how I like being Attorney General, and I always respond in the words of John Fitzgerald Kennedy, when they asked him about how he liked being President: he said it was probably a pretty good job when Coolidge had it.

We got a lot of people in Washington now from Georgia. It seems like a lot from Sumter County. And some from Dooley County. Somebody asked Jody Powell not long

ago, whose left in Georgia? He said, the smart ones.

My wife asked me what I thought about being Attorney General after I'd been up there two or three months, and she doesn't like it very much, and she said, what do you think about it now? And I said, I'm like the man who was about to be hanged. They said to him, do you have anything you'd like to say before we hang you? And he said, yes, this is going to be a terrible lesson to me.

I'm glad to see Paul Evans in office as Mayor. We grew up together in Americus. Tom Marshall was appointed to the Supreme Court last week by Governor Busby, and that gave us one President, one Attorney General, two Justices of the Supreme Court, Mayor of Warner Robins, and countless other officers in Georgia and the nation from Sumter County.

And a man asked me at church last Sunday about it. He said, it looked like you're getting too many people from Sumter County. And I said, well, we got others down there waiting in line. We've got a lot of people, deserving people, from Sumter County, particularly since the recession hit. The railer plants all had to close, and we've got to get more appointments.

Gene Harrington invited me to come here today to speak, and I didn't hesitate to accept his invitation, because I knew it'd be fun to come down here and see a lot of old friends, and see how Warner Robins has changed. I was here

four or five years ago, and I rode around Warner Robins, and I hate to admit it in public, but I got lost. And it was hard for me to believe that I could get lost in Warner Robins after having lived here and practiced law here for awhile, but I did.

I've been Attorney General now about six months, and one of the things that I knew already but it's been fortified in my philosophy, is that the people have to look for the administration of justice to the local courts, to the state courts. About 95 percent of all legal business is conducted in the state and local courts. Very little in the Federal courts.

Federal courts get most of the publicity, and some times the average citizen might be led into thinking that most all the justice is being conducted in the Federal courthouse. But that is not so. We have to look to the Federal courts -- to the state courts, local courts.

There are more cases tried in Georgia in the state courts than there are in all of the Federal courts in the United States. So if you'd think about it in that perspective, you begin to see the importance of an occasion like today, where you think enough of your system of justice that you built this fine, new courthouse, even though you have a courthouse and a state court room, and all, in Perry, you put one here to accommodate the large number of people who

live in this end of the county.

This, I think, is a way, is a trend that's a wave of the future. I think we'll see more and more neighborhood justice centers. In a sense, this is a neighborhood justice center. People can come here to get justice without having to go so far.

I think we've gone through a long period in this country where we tried to get away from the Justice of the Peace in rural America. We became urbanized, and we didn't bring our courts with us. Now we're going to have to go more into neighborhood justice, neighborhood courts. And we're right now at the Justice Department have three -- we have a plan for the neighborhood justice centers. We have the funding to set up three. And we're going to set up three in different parts of the country. And we're not going to have judges there at these neighborhood justice centers, and we're not even going to have lawyers. We're going to have paralegals and skilled personnel who know how to conduct interviews, find out what the problems are, and resolve as man as we can before we send the people whose problems can't be resolved, before we send them on to the courthouse.

We think this will work well. To give you one or two more figures on -- to show you, though, the importance of state justice, local justice, there are more policemen in New York City than there are people in the FBI. There

are more prosecutors in California than there are in the entire Department of Justice.

So if you'll think about that, you'll see how important it is.

Now, when I got to Washington, I started looking for policies, looking for policies first on the delivery of criminal justice. I never was able to find them.

So I finally concluded that we couldn't have a policy on civil justice and a policy on criminal justice. We have to have one policy on the delivery of justice.

And then I already knew that we had to look to the state and local courts. So I started meeting with governors and states attorneys general. I met with 23 states' attorneys general at one time. I met with ten governors at one time. I met with countless local prosecutors, trying to fashion the total justice system for the American people.

We're making a lot of progress in that. And I think if maybe by the end of this year we'll have it all tied together, and that we'll begin to make some real progress.

We're doing a lot of things, new things, at the Department of Justice. I -- Everything that I intend to do is on the drawing board or in process. Much is pending in the Congress. There are 24 parts to the Department of Justice. Every part has a two-year plan they're operating on. They have to write out the mission

and a two-year program, have all that going.

There are some problems -- and this is the last thing I'm going to mention to you, because I know you're hot. -- They used to have a song in Atlanta, the Wit's End Players, "They Are Tearing Up Peachtree Again."

And what they do in Washington is, they take over the system. They're always trying to change our system of government. And they got a group there now in the Congress who want to change the grand jury system. And they got a plan to give every witness there in the grand jury room a lawyer. I call it The Lawyers' Relief Act. It would absolutely hamstring the grand jury and probably end up where next we'd want to do away with the grand jury, because we'd say it was not a workable institution.

Well, I'm fighting that as hard as I can, and I believe I'm going to win. I just can't believe that we would have that many people in the Congress who'd want to do that.

There are some things you can do to improve the grand jury, but that's not one.

So lately, as I speak, I've been mentioning that, because I'd like the people to know there is a little tinkering going on. And I think you have to be very careful in Washington. You have to try to do a good job at your assigned task. But you also have to be on the alert for

these people who want to change our system. We have a great system of government. The free enterprise system is a great thing. It all ties together. and I don't think we want to change very much. Once in awhile there's something you can do to improve it. But we do not want to ever change anything just for the sake of change.

It's a great pleasure to be here with you today, and I look forward to talking with you after the meeting.

[Applause.]

MODERATOR: Thank you, Mr. Attorney General. And we're real proud to count you as one of us, and to have you with us today.

Before I call on the Reverend Ariel to dismiss us, we want to again thank you for coming out and being with us. We're going to have the court open, or the building open, as soon as we dismiss, for you to go through and look at the court. It's your court. And we're going to have some refreshments.

So we ask that you please stay with us, and that you go through and tour the building.

Now, I'll ask the Reverend Ariel to come forward and dismiss us.

REVEREND ARIEL: Dismiss us, we pray oh Lord, with thy blessing. And may we bring honor to this place by bringing honor to Thy name, in the name of Christ we pray, Amen.