



Department of Justice

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PRESS CONFERENCE

WITH

JOHN N. MITCHELL
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES

ATLANTIC CITY, NEW JERSEY

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INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CHIEFS OF POLICE

REPORTER: Mr. Attorney General, how would you feel about a specially trained federal task force to handle campus unrest and civil disorder?

MR. MITCHELL: I would oppose it as not being properly within the federal law enforcement establishment. I believe that when you are dealing simply with civil unrest, it ought to be handled by the campus administration and the local law enforcement agency.

REPORTER: Sir, do you have any position or opinion on the report of the Commission on Campus Unrest at Kent State?

MR. MITCHELL: I have not read it, and if I had, I would not comment on it because of our continuing investigation in the area.

REPORTER: What about the Scranton Commission Report?

MR. MITCHELL: Well, the Scranton Commission Report has good material in it, with which I can agree, it has some material in it with which I would disagree, and in one of those areas I feel that the Scranton Commission Report got off base in talking about the government, particularly the federal government as having been the cause of campus unrest and campus disturbances. And similarly so I do not believe that the report's recommendation that all of this can be cured by leadership at the federal level is viable.

The federal government did not create the unrest on the campus and while leadership at the federal level may be helpful it certainly is not in the realm of the absolute in which the Scranton Report puts that factor.

REPORTER: Who should take that responsibility sir?

MR. MITCHELL: It is primarily the responsibility, in my opinion, of the family, the church and schools. This is where education starts, where it proceeds and where it should terminate.

REPORTER: General Mitchell, you just concluded your speech and I noticed that you said the indiscriminate shooting of police officers in the United States should come to an end. There was a round of applause, but I didn't hear you specifically spell out what can the federal government do to stop these cop killings?

MR. MITCHELL: The federal government has limited jurisdiction in this area. Where we do have jurisdiction, basically, is in the area of interstate travel. We do, of course, operate in this area, and our intelligence information is provided to the state and local law enforcement officers. It is a cooperative effort so that where we do have overlapping jurisdictions, both jurisdictions can be brought to bear on the subject.

REPORTER: Do you hope that municipal and state law enforcement agencies will make more liberal use of legalized wiretapping to develop better intelligence along these lines?

MR. MITCHELL: The reference that I made to the suggested use of electronic surveillance has to do with the types of crimes that are stated in the statutes. When you get into the area of organized crime, as I illustrated in my speech, you do obtain information that has to do with police shootings. To the extent that the statute authorizes the use of wiretapping, I would certainly recommend that it be considered in depth by the state legislatures to provide the police with tools that are necessary. I think it will have benefit in this area.

REPORTER: Mr. Mitchell, New York City has been hit by a series of prison riots in the last couple of days, what in your judgment can be done to prevent this? Do you have to treat prisoners a little tougher or what?

MR. MITCHELL: Well, I'm not familiar with the basic problems in the correctional system of the City of New York. When I say basic problems, because all of our correctional institutions have basic problems, it was obvious that in the City of New York, it was caused by extensive overcrowding. I also understand from reading the newspapers that some of the complaints were about delays in the trials. As I have said so many times before, our criminal justice system, both the federal and state and local levels is geared more to the 18th and 19th Centuries than it is to the 20 Century.

We must upgrade all of our criminal justice system, which includes the correctional institutions at both the federal and local levels. We are providing a program in the federal government which hopefully will provide the funds and expertise so it may be undertaken at the state and local level. If we upgrade our correctional institutions, not only will we not have the problems that existed in New York over the weekend, but we will be able to reduce recidivism extensively. By so reducing recidivism we will reduce the rate of crime in this country.

REPORTER:

Senator Eastland is convening an investigating committee tomorrow in Washington and he terms the war on police a conspiracy. Have you any comment on that, sir?

MR. MITCHELL:

Well it all depends on how you define conspiracy. If you define it as a national, concerted undertaking by everybody who is shooting police, it is not so. If you look at some of these militant organizations that are recommending that people go out and shoot the police, then it could be considered a conspiracy. I'm certain that the testimony derived at the senator's hearings will go a long way on focusing on this matter.

REPORTER:

Mr. Mitchell, our country provides the men to defend this land and they do so without adequate insurance. Would there be any possibility that any federal statute could provide law enforcement officers with adequate insurance?

MR. MITCHELL: There is legislation to this effect before the Congress for consideration. I think that before it is acted upon, mature consideration should be given as to whether or not, where you have state and local enforcement people, you should cover them under a national arrangement or whether they should be covered like other state employees are under a state and local system. Both, of course, have merits and demerits involved, and I'm certain that before the legislation is passed, we will have a better understanding of which is the best system at this time.

REPORTER: In Montreal, Canada this morning, I'm from Toronto, there was a British attache' kidnapped by a terrorist group and is being held for certain demands. Can you tell me, sir, in your Administration functions, what precautions are taken to guard British diplomats, Canadian diplomats and attache's in Washington?

MR. MITCHELL: We have extensive precautions and as you may know, this Administration has established a protective service that covers the embassies and the personnel from foreign governments in this country. It use to be handled by the State Department. It is not being handled by a law enforcement agency. We think it's adequate to take care of that problem in this country -- to the extent that you can ever guard against it.

REPORTER: Sir, several of these police chiefs who attended Patrolman Burkes' funeral this morning indicated that leniency by the courts played an important part in this growing rash of attacks on policemen.

MR. MITCHELL: I don't think you can generalize in this area. Courts in the past have, in some instances, been over lenient and in others, of course, they have performed the proper judicial functions. To the extent that there may have been leniency on the part of courts in the past, I think that the tide is turning and that our justice will hopefully be more swift and more sure, to the point where it will act as a deterrent to those people who might undertake such acts.

REPORTER: What do you think of the Williams bill which would make murdering a police officer or a fireman much similar to the way the federal government moves in on kidnapping cases?

MR. MITCHELL: Here again, it is a question of whether that jurisdiction should be placed in federal hands. I don't think that anybody in this country wants a federal police force. and I would point out that the statistics of the Federal Bureau of Investigation shows that 96.4 percent of all police killings are solved by the local police. which has a record far in excess of any other category of homicides. I would feel that until it is definitely shown that we cannot handle this problem at a local level, we not put more police power in the federal government.

REPORTER: Sir, there is some evidence that some militant groups have been getting arms and grenades from federal armories. Have any steps been taken to stop that?

MR. MITCHELL: Very much so. The President has directed Secretary Laird that with respect to all of these installations, and this goes back sometime, that there be an examination made to ascertain whether or not the security of these institutions are proper, and if not, to implement it to the extent necessary to make sure these continued burglaries at the federal establishment be removed. As you know, some of these armories are under state control and do not fall within the federal establishment. As far as the federal establishment is concerned, everything that's possible to be done is being done in that area.

REPORTER: Mr. Mitchell, how far away are we from getting a replacement for Mr. Rogovin at LEAA?

MR. MITCHELL: As soon as Congress acts, and determines what the nature of the office will be, we will fill it. There are different provisions in the House bill from the Senate bill as to what the nature of that office should be in the future. We want to make sure we know what the office is to be before we put the candidate in there.

REPORTER: Mr. Mitchell, you talk of bringing people before trial within 60 days. This seems to be the thought that was expressed. How can this be done with the court systems that we have in bringing up speedier trials? You just mentioned that this is possibly one of the causes of what took place in New York.

MR. MITCHELL: The whole criminal justice system has to be improved to the point where trials may be brought within the requisite period of time. I don't know where you get your 60-day figure. That would be desirable in all instances, but where we have people that evidence danger to the community or other types of heinous crimes, I think we should arrange our calendars and put our judicial manpower to the trial of those cases and let the others find their proper level in the system.

REPORTER: Mr. Mitchell, is there any law in any legislation pending now that would make killing a law enforcement officer a federal crime?

MR. MITCHELL: Yes, there is, in a number of areas. The anti-riot statutes that we have been using on some of these militants to date, have provisions in them that if anybody crosses a state line for the purpose of killing a policeman or a fireman, that this constitutes a federal crime. One of the problems that we have when we are dealing with a purely local matter is where the federal jurisdiction might be brought in, either under existing statutes or under those that might be enacted. Basically, I think that with this problem of jurisdiction, we have laws on the books that address themselves to the problems almost as well as you can.

REPORTER:

In view of the fact that some militants who go on trial have very flamboyant attorneys, do you believe the defendants can get a fair trial?

MR. MITCHELL:

The defendants, of course, are the ones who pick their own attorneys. Hopefully, no matter whoever goes on trial will pick an attorney who acts in a way that will produce a fair trial, or not remove its possibilities. If the attorney acts in the way you described, I think the courts now will address themselves to the matter and censure him or remove him to the point where a fair trial will be conducted.