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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
TO THE
81ST ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE
INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CHIEFS OF POLICE

THE WASHINGTON HILTON

10:28 A.M. EDT

Chief Looney, distinguished guests, members of the International Association of Police:

It is a great privilege and a very high honor to have an opportunity of participating with you here this morning.

Frankly, if there had been enough room, I really wanted to bring the United States Marine Corps band with me, but it might have been a little embarrassing. Can you imagine if they played "Hail To The Chief" and 3000 of you stood up? (Laughter)

But frankly I have to admit being a little worried and a little concerned about standing up here this morning. You can imagine how it feels to be facing 3000 of the most capable, the most diligent, the most conscientious police officers in the world and right outside I am parked in front of a fire hydrant. (Laughter)

Six weeks ago, I told the American people and the Congress that we all have a lot of work to do. We have a long national agenda, and I stress today that the control of crimes, especially violent crime, is one of the top items on that agenda.

I think it is fair to say that all Americans can agree on some conclusions about crime. There is far too much of it. It can no longer be ignored. It can no longer be rationalized away. The time has come for all of us to act.

The point in dispute is precisely how crime can be reduced. I have some proposals that I will spell out later to both the Nation and to the Congress.

Crime is scarcely a new concern in this country. For more than 50 years its level has steadily increased. Crime is still on the rise. In fact, most of our statistics seem to be on the increase. Prices are up, unemployment is up. In addition, we face some serious shortages.

One shortage particularly bothers me. This is the shortage of easy answers. We are faced with growing problems on all fronts, and there is no easy answer to any of them.

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(OVER)

We all know that earthy description which President Truman gave to the Oval Office some years ago: "The buck stops here."

When it comes to fighting crimes, most of of the buck stops at your offices. You are in the front line, you are the top commanders in the war on crime.

As you well know, most police powers are reserved to the States and largely delegated to local communities. I think this is a good and key feature of our Federal system. It will remain a key feature as long as I have anything to do with it.

The Federal role is essentially supported. The solution depends upon State and local efforts under the leadership and guidance of all of you.

As you know, Washington provides direct assistance to States and local communities through the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration. Grants have increased to about \$880 million annually and most of it in block grants to the States. That is a lot of money and I look back to the first year, about seven or eight years ago, when it amounted to approximately \$50 million in the first instance.

But the total of \$880 million, which is roughly the annual appropriation now at the Federal level, it is actually only 5 percent of the total spent on State and local crime justice systems. Actually Federal money is essentially seed money. Perhaps the most important activity of the Federal Government in this area is research and development. We have learned very valuable lessons about the nature of crime and its prevention.

We are cooperating with local agencies in pilot development and in pressing new law enforcement tools.

In this process we have learned that there is need for better management, particularly the need to concentrate limited resources where they will be most effective.

There is also a need for greater citizen cooperation, particularly as ready and willing witnesses for effective management.

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We first have to have some hard decisions on priorities. As a starter I would suggest a high priority on violent crime and street crime in the inner-city. There is where the crime does the most damage to our whole urban structure. There is where crime most hurts the poor who already suffer enough.

One bright spot in the crime scene is the success of your efforts against the urban crime. Your concentration on street crimes seems to be paying off, and I compliment you and congratulate you.

But as we move forward in this area with the success that you have, let's keep the effort moving stronger and stronger.

Another priority as I see it is the habitual offender, the so-called career criminal. Most crime, according to the statistics, is the work of a limited number of hardened criminals. We must take the criminal out of circulation. We must make crime hazardous and very costly. We must insure that swift and prolonged imprisonment will inevitably follow each and every offense.

Only then will we deter others from pursuing careers of crime.

Accordingly, I have directed the Department of Justice to undertake in cooperation with State and local governments a career criminal impact program. It will target and keep track of professional criminals. This program will also assign priority to cases of habitual criminals and expedite the process by which they are brought to justice.

Here in the District of Columbia we have already seem dramatic results in a very short time. Perhaps this can be adopted as a similar program in other urban areas.

In the U.S. Attorney's Office, a special group known as the Major Violators' Unit, has been established. This unit tracks the cases of major repeat offenders. It insures that these cases receive the most urgent attention of prosecutors. This unit has dramatically reduced the ability of case-hardened offenders to escape through the loopholes of the criminal justice system.

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As I indicated, the results are already very impressive. For example, in the first month of operation, the Major Violators' Unit substantially increased the conviction rate for serious cases. The average time from arrest to trial has been reduced by at least three weeks.

The career criminal now realizes that serious cases will no longer simply slip through the cracks in the system.

In this area, you know better than I that all this cannot be done by the police in isolation. Effective anticrime management requires the close cooperation of police, prosecutors, courts and corrections.

Here they work together. You not only will obtain a better conviction rate, but you will save unbelievable hours, police hours that are now unfortunately wasted.

But to reduce the crime rate, we need the cooperation of one other party, namely, the public.

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Crime statistics, shocking as they are, often show us only the top of the iceberg. Too much crime goes unreported. A lot of witnesses never show up, especially after the fourth or fifth continuance.

A study in the District of Columbia shows that noncooperation of witnesses was by far the most common reason for losing major cases. Throughout this Nation, nearly half the victims of assault, robbery, burglary and larceny above \$50 failed to report the incident to the police. In larcenies below \$50, about 80 percent did not report.

I think it is reasonable to ask the question why, and according to a survey, the results show that most victims are frustrated, fearful and pessimistic about results. Even victims, unfortunately, do not want to get involved with all the paper work, interrogation and repeated visits to the court house.

In cases that after several continuances may be dropped anyway, and sometimes you know better than I, the victim fears reprisal.

Now, what can be done? First of all, we go back to good management. Fast action and better conviction rate of major crimes can help restore public confidence in the system. Better scheduling, better notification of witnesses and fewer continuances will serve to cut down the terribly frustrating waste of the witness' time.

There are many other things law enforcement professionals can do to encourage citizen cooperation and citizen initiative. Some communities have already launched very successful programs, and I congratulate each and every one of you in those instances.

LEAA has the information, the ideas and some blockgrant money to help you launch a program in your community, a program to overcome the sense of futility, frustration and fears and get the man on the street turned back to cooperation with the police.

Of course, the police can't do everything to win the war on crime, although you have done a magnificent job under most difficult circumstances. The police, plus the prosecutor, plus the courts, plus the prisons, cannot do the whole job. The community, and particularly the family, can be of tremendous help.

I think we on the outside recognize how difficult your job is. Under our constitutional system, the Federal Government, as I indicated earlier, can only give you limited aid and limited support, but I commit to you that this Administration will continue the kind of support that is needed and necessary for your job and the protection and the benefit of our fellow citizens.

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Progress is slow, but it is my honest judgment that I think we are on the right track. We are beginning, as we move in the decade of the seventies, to learn how to fight modern crime more effectively. And as we move together, I think the results will be increasingly evident.

In the District of Columbia, for example, there has been a fortunate combination of good management methods, very ample resources and outstanding leadership from Chief Jerry Wilson, who, unfortunately, is retiring this year.

Reported crime in the District of Columbia shows a 40 percent drop during his tenure in office, spanning the last five years. It was here in Washington that a sad but heroic chapter of police history was made last week.

Officer Gale Cobb became the first policewoman in the United States killed in the line of duty. I commend this brave officer who gave her life to protect her community.

To honor her memory, I ask this convention to stand in silent tribute to Officer Cobb, whose funeral is taking place at this very moment. Thank you.

This latest tragedy has a vital lesson for every American. Whatever the insufficiencies and inadequacies of our criminal justice system, the officer on the beat is laying his or her life on the line every single day to make our respective communities a better place in which to live.

The police officer, from the top to the bottom, deserves the respect and cooperation of every American, and as I close, I pledge you my full cooperation here today.

Thank you very much.

END (AT 10:45 A.M. EDT)