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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT  
AT THE  
LEAA CAREER CRIMINAL CONFERENCE

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

4:05 P.M. EDT

Mr. Attorney General, Attorney General Tyler,  
Mr. Velde, Mr. Work, ladies and gentlemen:

I am delighted to be here this afternoon and to give my personal encouragement and help and assistance to a program that I feel very strongly about.

Last September, as was mentioned by Mr. Velde, I directed the Department of Justice to develop a program to deal with the career criminals throughout the country. Its goals, as all of you know, are quick identification of those who repeatedly commit serious crimes, priority of prosecution of those cases, and the assurance of appropriate sentences upon conviction so that they could not return immediately to victimize the community.

And speaking of victimizing the community, it, of course, means the victimizing of the individual. And in a speech that I gave at the Yale Law School this past spring, where I sought to lay out some guidelines and some further direction, we used two phrases that, in my opinion, ought to be the direction in which we go -- concern for the victim of crime, and concern for the domestic tranquility of our country.

Now this program that you are a part of has been funded with LEAA grants and I commend each of you from your respective 11 communities for your participation to prove that a program can work in this field. I am enough of an optimist to believe that this kind of well-directed, well-funded thing, with the right personnel, will result in success.

I am told that it will be operational in all 11 cities in a relatively short period of time, and although we recognize it as experimental in nature I personally have very great expectations for its success.

All of you, through your various responsibilities, know far better than myself the toll that crime exacts from our fellow citizens, a toll measured in blood, treasure and peace of mind.

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Unfortunately, the statistics prove that crime is on the rise. Since 1960 -- and this is hard to believe -- reported crime has more than doubled. Last year we saw the annual crime rate increase by 17 percent, the largest yearly increase since the FBI began statistics in their department some 44 years ago.

This crime epidemic threatens the very foundation of our society, for it is law which makes human society possible. Each of us has taken an oath to uphold and to defend the Constitution which charges us with the duty, the very solemn obligation of insuring domestic tranquility.

But there can be little domestic tranquility when increasing numbers of citizens are robbed, mugged, raped, murdered. Each of us has a very unique opportunity to do something about this.

As you know, again far better than myself, a very large percentage of serious crimes are committed by a very small part --or small number--of offenders. The career criminal program aims directly at solving this specific problem. And the success of this program will pave the way for a far greater effort, a far sharper focus on career criminals by our criminal justice system.

The good part about this program, as I see it, is that it is a grassroots program. The Federal Government, through the Law Enforcement Assistance Act, has awarded some \$5 million in grants together with equipment, technical assistance and evaluation. But the day-to-day planning, the conduct and the decision-making are fundamentally yours at the local level.

I happen to believe that is the way it should be. With few exceptions, the prosecution of serious crimes in this country is solely within the jurisdiction of State and local authorities.

I gather from talking with the Attorney General and with others, you have all had a very productive day even though the weather of Washington interfered to some extent with your starting on time. Let me assure you we were a little late getting started in the White House this morning for reasons that were obvious, because of the weather.

If I might close with this observation, even though Disraeli once said "It is with words we govern men," I might add my personal belief that it is with words we also wear men down.

So let me end by thanking you for coming here, for working so hard in the preparation for this new operation and with the work that you will do when you get back to your local communities. I think it is a program with a very bright promise. And may God speed you as you proceed.

Thank you very much.

END (AT 4:12 P.M. EDT)