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THE WHITE HOUSE

ADDRESS TO THE 81st ANNUAL CONVENTION OF THE
INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CHIEFS OF POLICE
WASHINGTON HILTON HOTEL, WASHINGTON, D.C.

It's a great honor to be here at the 81st Annual Convention of International Association of Chiefs of Police. If there had been enough room, I really wanted to bring the U.S. Marine Corps Band with me -- but it might have been a little embarrassing. Can you imagine if they played HAIL TO THE CHIEF and all 3,000 of you stood up?

But frankly, I have to admit to being a little worried and a little concerned standing up here this morning. You can't imagine how it feels to be facing 3,000 of the most capable, the most diligent, the most conscientious police officers in the world -- and right outside, I'm parked in front of a fire hydrant.

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 want to stress today that the control of crimes, especially violent crime, is one of the top items on that agenda.

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 to act.

The point in dispute is precisely how crime can be reduced. I have some proposals which I will spell out later both to 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 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.

We all know that earthy description which President Truman gave to the Oval Office: "The buck stops here." When it comes to fighting crime, most of the buck stops at your offices. You are the front line commanders in the war on crime. As you know, most police powers are reserved to States and largely delegated to the local communities. That is a 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 supportive. The solution depends upon State and local efforts. As you know, Washington provides direct assistance to States and localities through the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration. Grants have increased to \$880 million annually, most of it in block grants to the States. That is a lot of money. But it is only five percent of the total spent on State and local criminal justice systems. Federal money is essentially seed money.

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Perhaps the most important activity of the Federal Government in this area is research and development. We have learned valuable lessons about the nature of crime and its prevention. We are cooperating with local agencies in pilot development and testing of new law enforcement tools.

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 need for greater citizens' cooperation, particularly as ready and willing witnesses.

For effective management, we first have to make 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 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 urban crime. Your concentration on street crime seems to be paying off. Let's step it up.

Another priority is the habitual offender -- the so-called career criminal. Most crime is the work of a limited number of hardened criminals.

We must take the criminal out of circulation. We must make crime hazardous and costly. We must ensure that swift and prolonged imprisonment will inevitably follow each 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 seen dramatic results in a short time. Perhaps this can be adapted for use in urban areas elsewhere.

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 ensures 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.

The results are already impressive. For example, in the first months 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 criminals now realize that serious cases will no longer simply slip through the cracks in the system.

All this cannot be done by the police in isolation. Effective anti-crime management requires the close cooperation of police, prosecutors, courts and corrections. Where they work together, you not only will obtain a better conviction rate, but you will save police hours that are now wasted.

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But to reduce the crime rate we need the cooperation of one other party -- namely, the public. 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 non-cooperation 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 dollars failed to report the incident to the police. In larcenies below 50 dollars, about 80 percent did not report.

Why? Because, as surveys show, most victims are frustrated, fearful, and pessimistic about results. Even victims do not want to get involved with all the paperwork, interrogations, and repeated visits to the courthouse in a case that, after several continuances, may be dropped anyway. Sometimes the victim fears reprisal.

What can be done? First of all, we go back to good management. Fast action and better conviction rate on 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 citizens' cooperation and citizens' initiative. Some communities have already launched successful programs. LEAA has the information, the ideas, and some block-grant money to help you launch a program in your community -- a program to overcome the sense of futility, frustration, and fear and get the man in the street turned back on to cooperation with the police.

Of course the police can't do everything to win the war on crime. The police plus the prosecutors plus the courts plus the prisons cannot do the whole job. The community and the family must help.

Your job is difficult. Under our constitutional system, the Federal Government can give you only limited support.

Progress may be slow, but I feel we are on the right track. We are beginning to learn how to fight crime effectively.

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 Gail Cobb became the first policewoman in the United States killed in the line of duty. I want to 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.

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 day to make the community a safe place to live. The police officer deserves the respect and cooperation of every American. I pledge you mine here today.

Thank you.

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