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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT  
TO THE  
TARRANT COUNTY/FORT WORTH  
BAR ASSOCIATION LUNCHEON

TARRANT COUNTY CONVENTION CENTER

1:30 P.M. CDT

Dick Brown, Senator Tower, John Lawrence, Bill David, Loren Hanson, Judge Brown, members of the Judiciary, our reverent members from the various churches of this community, ladies and gentlemen:

At the outset, let me express my deepest appreciation to the Southwest High School Band and to the Castleberry High School Choir. Thank you, both of you.

It is a great privilege and a very high honor to have the opportunity to be here this afternoon before the distinguished members of the Fort Worth/Tarrant County Bar Association, Federal Bar Association, and the Fort Worth/Tarrant County Young Lawyers Association, and I thank you from the bottom of my heart for this opportunity to join you on this occasion.

It is a very special privilege to be speaking just two days before we celebrate Law Day all across the United States. The rule of law is the very foundation of our rational society and the rule of law created by the people, which the people willingly obey, is central to a free and a democratic society.

In our Bicentennial year, Law Day takes on a very special significance, for our Founding Fathers in establishing this country dared to put the ultimate authority into the hands of those described in the first three words of the Constitution: "We, the people."

Not all men accepted this idea. Thomas Jefferson, in his first inaugural address recognized that some honest men feared a Republican government could not be strong, but Thomas Jefferson disagreed with them. He believed this to be the strongest government on earth. He said, and I quote, "I believe it the only one where every man at the call of law would fly to the standard of the law and would meet invasions of the public order as his own personal concern."

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Jefferson touched the very heart of our national fate. He said history would tell whether men could be trusted to govern themselves, and history has its answer.

Two centuries later, the United States of America is still a country where the people make the laws and the people obey them, and the United States of America still has the strongest and the freest form of government on this earth and that is why we can say we are very proud to be Americans.

Now we are on the threshold of our third century. I see this as the century of individual freedom in which individuals will increasingly fulfill themselves as they achieve their national or natural potential. For this to be the century of individual freedom, it must be the century of individual security. For the law to provide that security, we must have laws that are respected. We must keep the law alive by making sure that it changes to meet the changing needs of our society in America.

While protecting the rights of the accused, our emphasis must always be on protecting the rights of the victim. The victim must be our primary concern and the law must be our means of fulfilling the promise in our Constitution to insure domestic tranquility.

We must continue working to identify and to solve those social and institutional problems which cause crime in the first place, but there are also new efforts we can make and have been making to fight crime by improving the administration of justice. We must insure that the law is administered fairly, swiftly and surely.

One of my earliest concerns as President was to seek some cures for our crime problem, a problem which has been growing in this country for more than 50 years. I put crime control among the top items of our national agenda.

In 1975, we saw the rate of increase in crime drop substantially in America -- from 17 percent in 1974 to 9 percent in 1975 -- and we have found some productive ways to deal with crime by providing ideas and Federal seed money to the State and local authorities who have the responsibility for criminal prosecution.

Here in Tarrant County, for example, the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration will have provided almost \$2 million in aid to the District Attorney's Office from 1973 to 1978.

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The money has been used imaginatively by your local law enforcement agencies to serve many, many purposes. It has helped your attorneys to use their time, their talents, much more effectively by providing administrative help, continuous training and capital improvement, such as computers.

One very important function it has served -- it has been put to use by prosecuting attorneys in direct and immediate contact with police officers. By screening the cases as they are brought in, prosecution has been made very much more effective. This has helped to relieve overcrowding in the courts, which all too often lets criminals hide behind the logjam.

For example, LEAA last year finished a report on rape and its victims, and is currently sponsoring a major national survey on that subject. We must continue our efforts at the Federal level to help local authorities improve their Administration of justice. That is why I have recommended that funding for the Law Enforcement Assistance Act be extended through 1981, so that programs such as this can continue and so that we can confront special crime problems.

The studies will help local authorities to deal much more effectively and more extensively with rape victims and will aid in the prosecution of rapists. Over \$18 million of LEAA funds have been used by State and local authorities to find more effective ways of dealing with the problem of rape across the country.

In another area I am pleased to note that today the LEAA and the Administration on the Aging are signing an agreement which will help to target law enforcement resources on the criminal threat to the elderly and this is a serious problem all over the United States.

Still another program with very special promise was instituted at my direction shortly after I took office. In September of 1974 I directed the Department of Justice to undertake in connection with State and local Government a career criminal impact program. The career criminal program is founded on a very basic truth -- most Americans are law abiding and the vast majority of serious crimes in this country are committed by a very small minority of habitual offenders.

This small minority has chosen to place itself outside of our society, committing criminal acts not once but again and again and again. They are a chronic threat to our security.

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We must identify them, bring them to justice and make their punishment swift and certain, and we will.

Here in Texas two career criminal programs are actually now underway. In Houston one program began in July of last year and today the average time from arrest to indictment is nine days for those identified as career criminals versus 42 days for other criminal cases.

The time from arrest to trial for career criminals defendants is a month less and for other criminal defendants sentences have averaged 25.8 years. That is not a bad record. Most important of all, since this program got underway in Houston, there has been a significant decrease in the number of armed robberies compared to the year before.

Not far from here, in Dallas, another career criminal program has been in effect for the last six months. In that brief time, it has zeroed in on 23 third-time offenders. It has shown the career criminal what awaits him. Of those 23, 20 have received life sentences and three received 40-year sentences, again not a bad record.

Let me make very clear that we do not pursue this swift justice in these very heavy sentences out of vindictiveness. I believe in general we must do everything we can to rehabilitate those who have committed crimes and to help them regain their place in society.

But, for these career criminals, rehabilitation has obviously failed. These individuals have all been to one or more correctional institutions, and they have demonstrated for them at least rehabilitation programs have served no useful purpose.

Therefore, our duty -- and I emphasize our duty -- is to protect the innocent victim and potential victims by separating the career criminals from our society and keeping them confined for a longer and longer time.

Through programs such as this, we can help relieve the American people of a terrible threat to their lives and to their safety. By combatting crime we reaffirm the right of every American to enjoy life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

We must not be content until the potential criminal faces arrest so certain, punishment so heavy that he will lose his taste for acts of crime and acts of violence.

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Let me summarize the actions that we have taken to reduce crime in America. In addition to instituting the career criminal program and recommending the extension of funds for the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, my budget that is for fiscal 1977 provides funds for four new Federal prisons. I have directed the Department of Justice to develop new programs to protect and to assist the witnesses in Federal criminal proceedings while fully supporting the right of the law-abiding citizens to own firearms.

I have recommended legislation which would make mandatory sentences for those who use a gun in the commission of a Federal crime. I have intensified the fight against hard drugs, which we all know are directly connected in many cases with crimes.

Just yesterday I sent to the Congress a special message on drug abuse calling for mandatory minimum prison sentences for those convicted of trafficking in hard drugs. I have consulted with the leaders of Mexico, Columbia and Turkey to urge stronger action by them in cooperating with us to half the flow of hard drugs into the United States.

I have recommended that the Congress increase funds to get drug addicts into the treatment and out of crime. We are spending ten times more Federal funds on drug prevention treatment and rehabilitation this year than we spent just seven years ago.

In addition to mandatory minimum sentences for drug traffickers and for Federal crimes involving the use of dangerous weapons, I have recommended to the Congress mandatory minimum sentences for repeat offenders who commit violent crimes and criminals guilty of grave offenses, such as aircraft hijacking and kidnapping.

All of our effort in these many, many areas have been aimed at insuring domestic tranquility and the rule of law. But, let us remember that crime is just one threat to the peace and to the security of all Americans.

At the Federal level, we must fulfill our obligation to provide national security as well as personal security. Until we can achieve the rule of law in the global sense, a strong military capability is absolutely essential.

The American people must be kept secure and free from the threat of outside attack. This means we must maintain our high state of military preparedness, and we will. We will continue to insure that the United States of America is unsurpassed in military capability.

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Here in Texas you play a very, very important part in maintaining our national security. I was pleased to find out as we flew in here this morning that out at Carswell Air Force Base, that wonderful installation with all those fine people in the Air Force -- men, women, uniformed as well as civilian personnel -- that they had a recent alert called by their higher ups, and they achieved a 100 percent readiness factor. They should be congratulated.

Your aerospace industry keeps us strong, helps us in the search for new ways to deter aggression, and I salute you for it. The defense program that I am proposing will mean that the United States of America will remain unsurpassed for years and years to come if we keep the trend which I propose moving in the years ahead.

I am glad to report to you that, since submitting the budget in January of this year, we have finally convinced the Congress after ten years where they slashed, they cut, they reduced the budgets proposed by myself and my predecessors, they are apparently going to go along with the strong defense budget that I recommended for the next fiscal year. So, thank the Congress on this occasion.

Talking about that budget, just about three weeks ago we laid the keel for the first of our new class of nuclear submarines to be armed with the most accurate submarine ballistic missiles in the world. The Trident missile fleet will be the foundation for a formidable, technologically superior force through the 1980s.

We are now completing the final testing of the world's most modern and capable strategic bomber, the B-1. I budgeted in that budget we sent to Capitol Hill in January over one and one half billion dollars for the B-1 production in fiscal year 1977.

We are accelerating our work on a new intercontinental ballistic missile for the 1980s. We are developing a new use missile for both air and naval forces. Nor does our efforts stop with weapons, for we are also extending our Army divisions from 13 to 16 divisions. I pledge to every one of you and all others of the 215 million Americans that we will keep America strong, not strong for the sake of war, but strong for the sake of peace, which we now have.

We will continue this policy, this program of peace through strength and at the same time we will maintain our international leadership, negotiating wherever possible to reduce the level of tensions in the world. There are no easy answers, no simple solutions to the complex problems of personal and national security. But, our determination to solve those problems in itself is a source of strength. Our warning to those who threaten our security at home or abroad is the same. Americans will never be intimidated and Americans will keep the security and the independence that we have had for 200 years, and we will keep it forever in the future.

Thank you very, very much.

END (AT 1:51 P.M. CDT)