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Monday, May 24, 1976

Office of the White House Press Secretary  
(Mission Viejo, California)

THE WHITE HOUSE  
TEXT OF REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT TO  
BE DELIVERED AT THE ANNUAL  
CONVENTION OF THE CALIFORNIA PEACE  
OFFICERS ASSOCIATION  
(Anaheim, California)

I am honored to address this convention of the Peace Officers of California. Your daily struggle to keep the peace and to combat crime in this state has won the praise of the people of California. I am delighted to add my word of support and gratitude, as well.

In a special sense, the goal of your service and mine is the same: to make life secure for our fellow citizens. As President, for the last 21 months, I have been working at home and abroad to lay down a solid and secure foundation for America as our nation enters its third century. That will be a century for individual achievement and self-fulfillment. I see it as a century in which Americans will build on all the great accomplishments of our first 200 years.

But to do that, Americans must be secure--in their homes and on their streets--in their jobs--and in a peaceful world. It must be a century of security for all Americans.

Consider, for a moment, the very real concern of so many Americans about the problem of crime. Let us start with the great preamble of our Constitution, which seeks "to insure domestic tranquility." Law makes human society possible. It pledges safety to every member so that the company of fellow human beings can be a blessing instead of a threat.

Do we provide that domestic tranquility which the Constitution seeks? If we take the crime rates as an indication, the answer has to be no. Violent crimes on our streets and in our homes makes fear pervasive. They strike at the roots of community life. They make citizens fear each other. The time has come for society to act in its own self-defense.

As an important first step, I favor the use of the death penalty in the Federal criminal system in accordance with proper constitutional standards. The death penalty in certain circumstances should be imposed upon the conviction of sabotage, murder, espionage and treason.

In murders involving substantial danger to the national security, or when the defendant is a coldblooded hired killer, the use of capital punishment is fully justified.

The harsh fact is that passivity and permissiveness invite crime and that the certainty of punishment prevents crime, and I mean positive, swift and just punishment. But the criminal justice system need not be vindictive to be effective.

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As President, I will give no comfort to those who make false allegations of police brutality but excuse the real brutality that exists in America today, the brutality of hoodlums in the streets of our cities throughout America.

Millions of our citizens, including the elderly and poor, lock themselves up in their homes, fearing violence. I would instead lock up the criminals who make them afraid.

A legal system that is exploited by the criminal but ignores his victim is sadly out of balance. I ask your help and that of all Americans in restoring that balance.

The great majority of crimes constitute violations of state laws and therefore, under our constitution the responsibility for dealing with them rests primarily with local officials. The Federal government, however, can serve as a model by firmly and justly enforcing its own laws and by improving the quality of the Federal criminal justice system.

We recall in this Bicentennial year that our founding fathers adhered to the dictum of John Locke: "Where there is no law, there is no freedom." The overwhelming majority of Americans are law-abiding citizens. It is a small, hard core of law-breakers who commit a very large proportion of all crimes.

A recent study in one major metropolitan area recently showed that within one single year more than 200 burglaries, 60 rapes and 14 murders were committed by only ten individuals.

A great many serious crimes are committed by repeaters. Such criminals duly tried and convicted must be removed from our society for a definite period of time.

A law-abiding majority also has its rights and those rights should be given full weight on the scales of justice in America.

With very few exceptions, I strongly advocate mandatory minimum sentences for individuals who committed crimes or offenses involving the use of a dangerous weapon or who commit such grave offenses as aircraft hijacking, kidnapping and dealing in hard drugs, and for repeated offenders who commit Federal crimes that harm or endanger others.

The way to reduce criminal use of handguns is not to disarm law-abiding citizens. I am opposed to the registration of guns and gun owners. The way to reduce criminal use of handguns is to impose mandatory sentences for gun crimes, to prohibit the manufacture and sale of "Saturday night specials" and to concentrate our resources for employment in high crime areas.

Last July, I recommended to the Congress a bill to achieve these objectives, and I urge and strongly advocate action by the Congress to act immediately and without harassing the lawful gun owner.

Another important cause of the violent crime that plagues Americans and a major contributor to the soaring crime rate is drug abuse. The time has come to step up our fight, sharpen the weapons in our arsenal and launch a new and far more aggressive attack against this insidious enemy. The cost of drug abuse to this nation is staggering.

Every year more than 5,000 Americans die from direct drug-related causes. Every year more than 170,000 injuries can be directly traced to drugs. Every year the problem of drug abuse costs up to \$17 billion.

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Significantly, the greatest bulk of this \$17 billion is money lost through crime. Law enforcement officials estimate that up to one-half of robberies, muggings, burglaries and other forms of property crimes are committed by addicts to support their expensive and debilitating habit. And I pledge to you today that we will spare no effort to crush the menace of drug abuse.

Clearly, as we look at the picture today, our first defense must be directed at our own borders to clamp down on the illegal flow of drugs from foreign sources. And since 80 to 90% of the current flow of heroin comes across the Mexican border, we must begin our crackdown there. But our efforts must not stop there. We must also accelerate our law enforcement efforts throughout our own country.

Frankly, despite all the rhetoric of recent years, I do not believe that we have yet succeeded in making it tough enough for drug traffickers. As far as I am concerned, the people who traffic in hard drugs are nothing less than merchants of death and should be put behind bars.

Yet Justice Department studies show that more than a quarter of those convicted of narcotics trafficking do not spend a single day in jail. The extraordinary laxity that sometimes exists was illustrated recently in a case when law enforcement officers arrested 31 people, most of whom were major violators responsible for very large shipments of heroin into the United States, 19 of those arrested were immediately freed on a \$500 personal recognizant bond, even though their offenses were punishable by 15 years in jail.

All but two of the 19 had long, long arrest records, and one was on parole for a narcotics offense. This is unforgivable, completely indefensible. We have to close legal loopholes that permit traffickers to escape the federal penitentiary. Those who live off the misery of others must pay the price, and the higher the price, the better.

Above all, we must always remember that law enforcement alone cannot win the war on crime. In fact, the combined efforts of the Federal government, state and local authorities will be of little use unless the American people rally to fight the scourge of crime within their own communities. I am particularly encouraged by the citizen coalitions against crime that are cropping up all over the country. Here, as in other law enforcement areas, California is in the forefront. The 50,000 volunteers in the neighborhood watch program of the city of Los Angeles, for example, have been able to cut crime substantially -- and in Vallejo not a single member of the city's home alert program had their home burglarized during all of 1975.

Americans have always stood united and strong against all enemies. Crime and drug abuse are enemies that we can overcome but there must be a personal and a national dedication to the goal.

If I had to sum up the record of my administration in just a few words, it would be peace, prosperity, and trust in America.

Today America is at peace. Your sons are not being drafted, they are not dying on any battlefield. I want to maintain the peace, advance peace among all nations, secure that peace through strength and perseverance and leave that legacy of peace for our children and their children.

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I will continue my policies of cutting your taxes, expanding the private economy, reducing bureaucracy and useless regulation, and restraining spending. My policies have brought us from the depths of recession to a sustained recovery, and will ensure that runaway inflation never again robs us or our loved ones of the rewards of honest work and lifetime savings.

I want to pursue the steady course that led from war to peace, from recession to recovery, from cynicism to confidence, from fear to faith.

Finally, I want to finish my most important job, restoration of trust in the Presidency itself. As your President, I will promise no more than I can deliver and I will deliver everything that I promise.

The reason I am in this race to stay is to ensure peace, prosperity and trust for the future. The future belongs to those who come after us.

We Americans have always known that life will be better for our children than it was for us. Because life for us has been better than it was for our parents.

What do I see ahead for this wonderful country of ours? I see a strong and confident America, secure in a strength that cannot alone be counted in megatons and rejoicing in riches that cannot be eroded by inflation or taxation.

I see an America where life is valued for its quality as well as its comfort, where the individual is inviolate in his Constitutional rights, where the government serves and the people rule.

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