

Crime - Gangs

TO: Harold Ickes
Erskine Bowles
Don Baer

FROM: Bill Curry
RE: United States Attorneys Event
DATE: November 28, 1995

This follows up on an earlier memo regarding a proposed White House event at which the President commends United States Attorneys for their success in prosecuting gang violence in cities. I have worked with Catherine Russell and Beth Wilkinson of the Justice Department, both of whom have been very helpful in collecting statistics and anecdotes, identifying important issues and refining the overall proposal.

This event is ready to go forward. Given the release of favorable FBI crime statistics on November 19, the sooner we move on this the better; the first full week of December, upon the President's return from Ireland, would be ideal.

The event is relatively simple. The President, flanked by Federal prosecutors:

1. Outlines the Administration's strategy for prosecuting violent crime;
2. Describes the results, including both compelling statistics and powerful anecdotes;
3. Presents Letters of Commendation to between 5 and 10 U.S. Attorneys selected from across the country for their outstanding work.

The event might include an endorsement of a proposed bill that

strengthens Federal law enforcement's ability to combat juvenile crime.* Finally, the President publicly thanks all 94 U.S. Attorneys nationwide and the Justice Department, and exhorts them to continue their efforts.

BACKGROUND

Across the country, United States Attorneys have received very positive press for their innovative leadership in cracking down on violent crime. In particular, they have won praise for their effective use of RICO statutes against urban street gangs. Use of RICO in conjunction with the creation of cross-jurisdictional task forces has produced measurable results.

These results reflect a new strategy for prosecuting violent crime at the Federal level for which this Administration has yet to receive adequate credit. The elements of this strategy include: a shift in emphasis from white collar crime to violent crime; a focus on recidivists; a focus on urban street gangs utilizing RICO laws; a greater willingness to work with state and local officials, and a greater utilization of interagency task forces.

It is time for the President to publicly give the U.S. Attorneys credit for all they have achieved. Over the past 21 months, United States Attorneys have filed 11,645 cases against 15,969 violent criminals in Federal courts.** During the same period of time, 13,294 violent criminals either pleaded guilty or were found guilty -- an 85% conviction rate. Ninety percent of those criminals were sentenced to hard time in Federal prisons.

This full court press is paying off. On November 19, the FBI released the latest crime statistics. The news is good. It includes a 2% drop in the overall crime rate and a 4% drop in the rate of violent crime. These decreases occurred exclusively in urban areas, led by an 8% drop in the nine largest cities. Suburban and rural crime rose slightly, as did violent crime among juveniles, continuing a disturbing pattern of recent years.

As one might expect, there is disagreement within the criminal justice community regarding how best to interpret these statistics. The disagreement extends to our own Justice Department. People disagree on what caused the drop and on how long it will continue.

Whatever the disagreements, people do agree that the statistics themselves are reliable and that Federal initiatives - - from community policing to assault weapons ban, from cross-jurisdictional task forces to tougher federal sentencing -- have made a real difference in the war on crime. In large cities where the dramatic decreases in violent crime have occurred, local law enforcement officials specifically attribute the drop to the Federal government's help in fighting gang-related crime. This is something to crow about, and the best time to do it is now.

This Administration has done a good job so far of telling people what we have done to fight crime. Indeed, we have done such a good job that it is hard to find new ways to take deserved credit when good news like these FBI statistics breaks. There are only so many times you can go to the well with stories on

community cops or assault weapons. But the story of the U.S. Attorneys is still fresh enough to get attention. And it's a great story.

For this event to work, we do not have to overargue the causal connection between the Administration's efforts to combat crime and the reported reduction in crime. Those statistics will speak for themselves. However, it is a wonderful opportunity for the President to take credit by giving credit to the U.S. Attorneys and others who are fighting and winning the war against crime. The message is that the Administration's strategies are working. The proof is in the statistics and in powerful stories like those that follow.

New Haven/Bridgeport Connecticut

For many years, gangs like the Bridgeport Latin Kings have held sway over inner city neighborhoods throughout Connecticut, a very rich state with very poor cities. Drug dealing and related violence transformed once decent working class neighborhoods into war zones.

The United States Attorney for Connecticut has been an integral part of a co-ordinated effort to break up gangs like the Latin Kings and send them to Federal prison. Recently, over 30 members of the Latin Kings were charged under a 38 count indictment. As of this writing, 25 defendants, including the leaders of this vicious gang, have either pleaded guilty or been convicted; additional convictions are expected any day.

This prosecution involved the U.S. Attorneys office, the

State Attorneys office, the Bridgeport and New Haven Police Departments, the Connecticut State Police and Department of Corrections, and the FBI, DEA and ATF. It is an excellent example of the effective cross-jurisdictional law enforcement instigated by U.S. Attorneys across the country.

Notably, local law enforcement in Hartford directly attributes the dramatic decrease in the murder rate (the number of murders decreased by nearly 45% since 1994) to the U.S. Attorney initiated Task Forces and other Federal assistance.

Chicago, Illinois

In Chicago, the United States Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois has waged several successful battles in the war against gangs and gang-related crime.

In May of 1995, after a lengthy investigation and prosecution, 18 out of 21 members of the Undertaker Vice Lords were convicted of narcotics trafficking and conspiracy charges. Under strict federal sentencing guidelines, the leaders of the gang received mandatory life sentences; other convictions led to significant sentences.

The United States Attorney's office is also putting an end to 25 years of gang-related violence by the Gangster Disciples, a legendary and highly organized Chicago gang. Over the last quarter century, the Gangster Disciples have been responsible for the sale of millions of dollars worth of narcotics on the streets of Chicago. This gang has ruthlessly protected its lucrative criminal activity through violence, intimidation, coercion and

murder. In an ironic twist, the gang has established so-called "community outreach" organizations whose actual purpose was to launder money from drug sales and extorted "street taxes."

A joint investigative and prosecutorial effort that combined the resources of the U.S. Attorney's office, the DEA, the ATF, the FBI and many state and local law enforcement agencies led to an indictment charging a total of 39 gang leaders and members. Prosecutors expect to obtain convictions against the vast majority of these defendants.

The impact of this investigation and prosecution has already been felt throughout the community. At this time, at least 2 other major cases are pending against Chicago gangs, most notably the Traveling Vice Lords.

Brooklyn, New York

In recent years, Asian criminal business associations and the violent gangs they sponsor have physically and economically intimidated neighborhoods throughout the Borough of Brooklyn. According to the Justice Department, the breadth and severity of these organizations' criminal activities rival those of the Mafia. The United States Attorney for the Eastern District of New York has used RICO and a variety of cross-jurisdictional and community-based techniques to crack down on gang leaders and build strong cases against the business leaders who direct the gangs. Co-operation between Federal, state and local authorities has been especially useful given the sophisticated nature of these criminal activities. As a result, the infamous leader of

the Tsung Tsin Association, a powerful Chinatown business association, pleaded guilty to conspiracy to murder, among other charges. Successful prosecutions like this are steadily reducing the presence and power of the Asian criminal organizations and their related street gangs.

Fayetteville, North Carolina

Although most Americans assume that gang-related crime occurs mostly in major urban centers like New York, Chicago and Los Angeles, the gang phenomenon has swept the nation in recent years. Gang migration, as it is called, is an increasing reality for smaller cities across the country that have been beset by gang-related crime.

In Fayetteville, the United States Attorney for the Eastern District of North Carolina has led the effort to rid the Fayetteville area of a steadily increasing gang presence. It has successfully prosecuted the leaders of several of the most violent street gangs, including the Hollywood Heights Hustlers and the Grove View Terrace Court Boys. In the course of these investigations, the U.S. Attorney initiated task force solved numerous homicides, "invasion" home shootings and drive by shootings. All of these violent crimes were believed to have been a by-product of internecine gang warfare.

Overall, the Fayetteville area task force is credited with obtaining 76 indictments and 61 convictions, with an average sentence of 230 months; some defendants were sentenced to life in prison. These efforts have steadily reduced the gang presence in

Fayetteville and gone a long way toward restoring security to the streets of that city and its suburbs. Local officials, including county District Attorneys, credit the task forces with the steady reduction in violent crime.

Notably, the U.S. Attorney's Office in North Carolina, in conjunction with state and local law enforcement and the ATF, convened a national conference to study gang crime problems and to share information regarding gangs and gang migration throughout the country.

Sacramento, California

In other cities across the country, United States Attorneys have led the way with innovative strategies to combat gangs and gang-related crime. In Sacramento, the United States Attorney for the Eastern District of California created the Anti-Violent Crime Strike Team to implement the Anti Violent Crime Initiative. Working from the premise that the bulk of violent crime is committed by a relatively small percentage of criminals, this combined effort targeted armed repeat offenders and gangs.

The Strike Team's first phase led to the arrest of 79 targets, including two murder suspects and one defendant with 19 prior convictions. The Sacramento Police Department was so pleased with the results that it led the effort to create a permanent multi-agency unit modeled on the Strike Team. Since it became operational, the team has made over 360 arrests.

CONCLUSION

Most people think that crime is rising. Most people worry that urban crime, in particular, is intractable and that urban gangs are nearly impenetrable. This event gives us another chance to pass on the good news that the crime rate is falling. At the same time, it shows that government, with the right strategy and the right leadership, can deal effectively with seemingly intractable and impenetrable problems. In a very real sense, this is a REGO event.

Most people thought that the Mafia was impenetrable, but the Bush Administration used RICO statutes to put scores of mobsters behind bars. It was a startling achievement, but they received little, if any, credit. Let us not repeat the mistakes of the past. As we win the war against the racketeering of today's mobsters -- the urban street gangs -- let's make sure people know about it.

* This bill is still being vetted by the Justice Department. Its principal impact is to expand Federal Law enforcement's ability to prosecute juveniles as adults for serious felonies (e.g., violent crimes).

** The number of cases brought in Federal courts has actually dropped slightly for two reasons: (1) the cases that are prosecuted are increasingly complex, and (2) federally led task forces now frequently bring their cases in state courts.

February 26, 1996

MEMORANDUM TO BRUCE REED
 DON BAER
 BILL CURRY
 ANNE WALLEY

FROM: RAHM EMANUEL

SUBJECT: GANG SUPPRESSION

Overview:

The objective of this event is to follow up on The President's statement during the State of the Union, regarding gangs. This objective is based on targeting the ten most notorious gangs in the nation in the same manner we targeted and eliminated the mob as an influential force in American society. The message of the event is to demonstrate how once gangs are removed from community life, the community can flourish again.

Bridgeport and New Haven, Connecticut are ideal examples of the effectiveness of our anti-gang efforts both by community policing and the direct initiatives of our United States Attorney. The event would highlight the success of these two programs and how they worked in tandem.

The Announcement:

The President would announce the funding for the New England Gang Tracking Center. The center would serve as a central resource of information and records for the use of all New England law enforcement and prosecutors in order to track and record all gang activity. The announcement includes the goal of expanding the computer system to create a National Gang Tracking Center by the end of the year. (The funding for this center comes out of the drug office; Dennis Burke is now negotiating with the FBI for the full funding for the national program. The New England Center serves as the backup program until then.)

New Haven:

The city of New Haven is the best example of effective community policing that draws out the community in support of police efforts. The police chief of New Haven is a supporter of the President and with the help of the funds for Cops, has been able to dramatically reduce the amount of crime in New Haven. (New Haven and Bridgeport are both under the jurisdiction of the United States Attorney, but New Haven is in a democratic congressional district.)

The Event:

The idea of the event would include the President, the United States Attorney General, the United States Attorney, the regional FBI representative, the New Haven Police Chief, other police representation from New England, members of Congress from New England, leaders of the Neighborhood Watch, and the young adults who participate in the Police academy program. The Attorney General would lead the discussion and walk the President through how this group targeted gangs, tracked gang activity, persecuted gang members, and took back their community from these gangs.

Notes:

- Bill Curry can give recommendations as to where in New Haven is best.
- I have also had a conversation with the Justice Department about updating and producing their National Strategy to Coordinate Gang Investigations Report to serve as a manual for this event.