

Nixon Panel Says Official Corruption Impedes Nation's Effort to Curb Crime

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WASHINGTON, Aug. 18 — Government corruption "stands as a serious impediment to the task of reducing criminality in America," according to a commission established by the Nixon Administration to chart a national program against street crime.

The commission, formed by the suggestion of former Attorney General John N. Mitchell, concluded that, as long as official corruption flourished, "the war against crime will be perceived by many as a war of the powerful against the powerless; 'law and order' will be a hypocritical rallying cry, and 'equal justice under law' will be an empty phrase."

The National Advisory Commission of Criminal Justice did not mention the Watergate scandal. However, the commission decided to discuss the issue of integrity in government, it said, because the American public believes there is "widespread corruption" among public officials at all levels of government, because corruption results "in a staggering cost to the American taxpayer" and because corruption breeds further crime by providing a model of lawlessness "that undermines an acceptable rule of law."

2 Views on Demonstrations

The commission said that the public perception of government corruption and the power of large campaign contributors might have contributed to the belief that demonstrations were the only way to achieve change. President Nixon, in his Watergate statement last Wednesday, argued the opposing view, contending that the demonstrations created an atmosphere of lawlessness that may have infected some of his aides.

Although a summary report by the commission was made public on Aug. 9, the commission's 70-page section on "Integrity in Government" will not be published for several weeks.

The commission recommended hundreds of specific actions that state, county and local government should take to curb

corruption. Among the key recommendations were the following:

¶Every state should adopt laws requiring all state, county and local officials to publicly disclose each year—and at least two years before Election Day—all their financial and professional interests. If an official is a partner in a law firm, the disclosures should include all clients whose annual fees exceed \$2,000 or 5 per cent of the firm's income.

¶Every state should add provisions to their laws making certain specific conflict-of-interest situations a crime punishable by heavy penalties.

¶Every state should approve laws requiring the disclosure of campaign finances that are at least as stringent as those passed by Congress. These new reporting requirements would apply to all state, county and local officials.

¶Every state should add laws prohibiting campaign contributions by persons who transact more than \$5,000 in business with the involved unit of government or who are directors or shareholders owning more than 10 per cent of a corporation engaged in such transactions.

All states having a history of organized crime should establish a continuing statewide ability to investigate and prosecute corruption both inside and outside of the criminal justice system. The office charged with this responsibility should have the power to compel testimony, obtain grants of immunity, hold private and public hearing and present evidence to a grand jury for indictment.

Outspoken Assessment

The comments and recommendations of the commission—contained in the final draft page proofs—are considered the most outspoken and detailed assessment of the corruption problem in the United States ever made by a Federal panel.

According to Thomas J. Madden, the commission's executive director, the commission members first considered the section on integrity in government last December and gave its final

approval to it in a meeting the following month.

The far-ranging report on corruption has emerged at a time when many officials in the Nixon Administration have been accused of being involved in a long series of illegal actions, conflicts of interest, corrupt acts and alleged attempts to cover them up.

The man who initiated the commission—former Attorney General Mitchell—has been indicted for the obstruction of justice on charges of attempting to block the investigation of a corporation whose president contributed \$200,000 to Mr. Nixon's re-election campaign. Vice President Agnew has been informed that he is under investigation on charges involving extortion, bribery and tax evasion. The Justice Department's Watergate investigation has already resulted in the conviction of two men. Seven others have pleaded guilty and more indictments are expected.

The commission, headed by Russell W. Peterson, the former Republican Governor of Delaware, said it did not limit corruption to the simple cash purchase of a favor.

Corruption, the commission said, also includes subtle conflict-of-interest situations where the officeholder receives such a benefit as the promise of a job later on from a company that has come before him in his official capacity.

Electoral Process Criticized

"Finally, corruption, as defined here, may flow from the election process itself," the commission said. "Indeed, the commission recognizes the electoral process as a major source of corruption."

"The payment or promised payment of campaign contributions in return for official conduct constitutes a bribe," the commission continued. "Moreover, dependence on a source of campaign funding represents the most pervasive and constant pecuniary shackle on the judgment and action of elected officials."