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Ford Asks Action to Insure Prison for Violent Crimes

He Tells Yale Convocation Lawbreaking in Streets, Home, Government and Business Threatens the Nation

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NEW HAVEN, April 25—Saying that crime in the streets, in the home, in government and in business is preventing the government from fulfilling its constitutional mandate to "insure domestic tranquility," President Ford called today for measures to insure that convicted criminals were sent to prison.

In a speech prepared for the 150th convocation dinner of the Yale University Law School, Mr. Ford declared that "we are facing a basic and serious problem of disregard of the law." Mr. Ford graduated from the Yale Law School in 1941.

In his speech he pointed out that the number of violent crimes committed in this country had risen steadily. In an apparent reference to the Watergate scandal, he said, "We have recently suffered from the national disgrace of lawbreaking in high places."

"Crime in high places — whether in the Federal Government, state governments, local governments or in business and organized labor—sets an

example that makes it all the more difficult to foster a law-abiding spirit among ordinary citizens," Mr. Ford said.

The President pledged that he would make it a matter of the highest priority to restore "decency, honesty and adherence for law at all levels" to the executive branch of Government. He urged the same dedication in other areas of government and sectors of society.

Mr. Ford said that hardly a day passed without "some politician" exploiting the growing fear of violent crime and calling for a massive crackdown. But the problem is a complex one, calling for "a precise and effective solution," he said.

The problem involves overloaded courts, an increase in the number of arrests that outstrip the increase in the number of prosecutors, judges and public defenders, and the growing incidence of plea bargaining.

One consequence of all this,

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Mr. Ford said, is that imprisonment seldom follows conviction for a felony.

"I am urging," the President said, "that virtually all of those convicted of a violent crime should be sent to prison. And this should be done especially if a gun was involved or there was other substantial danger of injury to a person or persons. There certainly should be imprisonment if the convicted person has prior record of conviction."

Focuses on Repeaters

Mr. Ford pointed out that most serious offenders were repeater criminals and said that society owed it to the victims of crimes to get these repeaters off the street.

Saying that "this is just everyday common sense," he added that the crime rate would go down if habitual criminals were kept in prison.

Mr. Ford said that the convicts should be treated humanely in prison, with loss of liberty the chief punishment. An improvement of the facilities for and treatment of prisoners "is long overdue," he said.

"But it is essential that there be less delay in bringing arrested persons to trial, less plea bargaining and more courtroom determination of guilt and innocence, and that all, or practically all, of those actually convicted be sent to prison."

The President said that the White House role in helping bring down the crime rate must necessarily be limited because most violent crime falls under state and local jurisdictions.

Sees a Federal Role

But he said that the Federal Government could augment the efforts of state and local authorities and that the Federal Code could be modified to make more sentences mandatory and, therefore, "punishment more certain for those convicted of all violent crimes."

The Government could also provide leadership by giving priority to making funds available for judges, prosecutors and public defenders.

Mr. Ford's proposals may well be a precursor of legislation that the White House will propose soon.

Ron Nessen, the White House press secretary, said at a news briefing earlier today that tonight's speech anticipated a message on law and crime that the President would send to Congress in a month or so.