

13 Steps to Improvement In Criminal Justice

By Richard G. Kleindienst

MIAMI BEACH—I would like to suggest a broad agenda for our mutual [Federal and state] but separate action in the field of criminal justice.

First, we need to build strongly on the beginning already well made in better training and education for peace officers.

Second, along with this increased professionalization of peace officers, we need to improve their compensation to attract more people who will commit themselves to a lifetime profession.

Third, we need to move strongly ahead in providing equal hiring and promotion opportunities for minority members in our police departments and our corrections institutions.

Fourth, we need to improve the training, the compensation and the professionalization of public prosecutors.

Fifth, we need to complete the task, already so well advanced, of providing legal aid and public defenders for all Americans who may need them.

Sixth, we need to extend the use of modern management techniques, including data processing, in the administration of courts and court calendars.

Seventh, we need to provide the means for relieving the criminal courts of those cases—such as drunk arrests—which can be handled as well or better by administrative agencies.

Eighth, we need to promote the work, already under way by bar associations and judicial councils, of modifying court procedures to minimize deliberate attempts to delay or frustrate justice.

Ninth, we need to further the effort, already begun by some states and the Federal Government, to overhaul and simplify their criminal codes.

Tenth, we need to promote, without impinging on judicial independence, more appropriate and consistent sentencing for persons convicted of the same types of offense.

Eleventh, we need to establish many more separate facilities at the state and local level for the special treatment of narcotics addicts and of juveniles.

Twelfth, we need to increase the trained manpower and womanpower in the field of probation and parole, and we need to create more large-scale programs to involve private citizen groups in the process of restoring

ex-offenders to useful lives in the community.

Thirteenth, we need to reorient our correctional institutions away from the prison-fortress concept and toward the task of salvaging human lives for meaningful citizenship.

This agenda is the rather brief and generalized offering of one public servant involved in the criminal justice process in the United States. Amplification of each item would require a speech in itself. Other officials could undoubtedly add further items to a proper agenda.

Certainly such an agenda comes with a high price tag. But we have long known that if we can interdict the vicious cycle of crime, noncorrection, and more crime, we can bring about long-term savings, not only in the monetary cost of crime and of fighting crime, but also in more important savings—the salvaging of human lives.

For my part, I want you to understand that I feel a very heavy responsibility to provide leadership for further improvement in every one of these areas. I can assure you that the Department of Justice will be devoting intensive efforts in the months immediately ahead to accomplish this. I place the greatest priority on developing concrete programs to improve enforcement, courts and corrections, and on achieving faster progress in the future than we have in the past.

At the same time, I am aware that the bulk of the action must take place at the state level. My purpose in sharing these concerns with you today is not to order other people's priorities, but respectfully to urge consideration and action on a huge and pressing nationwide problem. My purpose is also to try and define the magnitude of the task before us. For to grasp the magnitude is to realize, at the same time, a terrible sense of immediacy. The job is so big, and in the time-scale of history we began working on it only yesterday. The growing incidence of jail and prison disorders, the frequent resort to the bomb and the incendiary, the exploitation of terror by a new breed of extortionists—these are some of the warnings we are receiving in an era in which even technology can be commanded by desperate men.

Richard G. Kleindienst, United States Attorney General, made these remarks, excerpted here, last month.