

35th annual Law Enforcement Officials Association conference

Senator Daniel K. Akaka Papers

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REMARKS OF THE HONORABLE DANIEL K. AKAKA
35TH ANNUAL LAW ENFORCEMENT
OFFICIALS ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE
KAANAPALI, MAUI
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Aloha!

It is both a pleasure and an honor for me to be here today to speak to you the leaders of Hawaii's law enforcement community.

I would like to talk to you today about pertinent issues that are currently before Congress, specifically prison reform and rehabilitation, drug control and restrictions on assault weapons.

*Let me first talk about our nation's Prisons: their
Looking at both the population*

*(update
on hearing*

~~characteristics and physical infrastructure of our
prisons across the nation, certain significant traits
are evidenced.~~

Of the approximately 600,000 men incarcerated, fifty percent did not have full-time jobs when arrested, and the majority never completed high school. Moreover, according to Justice Department statistics, nearly one third of these prisoners were under the influence of narcotics when they committed their offenses. Upon release, most will eventually return to a life of crime.

Against this backdrop, these persons are institutionalized in facilities that are woefully overcrowded, not to mention outdated.

Almost half of our country's inmates are housed in structures that were built before 1925. It is estimated that \$8-10 billion would be required just to bring U.S. prisons up to minimum standards.

And, of course, none of this even takes into account anticipated increases in our prison population. The escalation of our domestic drug crisis alone, coupled with our heightened enforcement efforts, will exacerbate this situation even further.

As a consequence, Congress is encouraging states to consider and develop alternatives to standard incarceration.

I have been working with Congressman Charles Rangel, my Chairman on the House Select Committee on Narcotics Abuse and Control ~~with regard to~~ ^{MOVE} legislation ~~we recently introduced~~ that would challenge individual states to find appropriate sentences for non-violent offenders that do not involve imprisonment.

The proposal would provide incentive grants to states for initiating alternative programs such as so-called "boot camps", house arrest mechanisms, innovative substance abuse treatment and educational courses leading to either the securing of a high school diploma or adequate vocational training.

In seeking remedies to these various dilemmas, however, we are attempting to address our criminal problems from a largely symptomatic aspect.

Albeit imminently vital, this is but one prong of our required plan of action.

The attack we focus upon root causes must also assuredly be aimed at the scourge of drugs in our society. In 1988, we were able to get passed into law our second major anti-drug initiative in 2 years.

It established the federal death penalty for three types of drug-related slayings: (1) for any persons who commit homicide while engaged in the furtherance of a continuing drug enterprise, or (2) in the commission of a major drug felony or (3) for anyone who kills or causes the death of a federal, state or local law officer. The minimum federal sentence for these crimes is 20 years.

The Act also mandates life imprisonment without parole for three-time drug felons.

Hopefully, these penalties will add some significant deterrent impact to our other efforts in this area.

Certainly, the most-publicized aspect of this legislation as the designation of a so-called "Drug Czar," the Director of Drug Control Policy. Former Secretary of Education, William Bennett, as you all know, was appointed to fill that role, and he is slated to report to the Congress a month from now, detailing his overall strategies for combating this devastating and insidious enemy.

Early indications are that there will be an emphasis on reducing demand by targeting recreational users for arrest, while stepping up interdiction activities, rehabilitative treatment and preventive education.

Targeting recreational users as a matter of national policy is an interesting approach. Generally speaking, these individuals have jobs, families and live otherwise respectable lives. As such, one could safely assume that they would be much more easily discouraged from continuing their patterns of usage, knowing that they could no longer feel secure in the notion that resource-thin law enforcement agencies were giving almost total priority to hard-core addicts, dealers and smugglers. Public humiliation and the destruction of careers and families present an immense deterrent threat to these types of people. With regard to cocaine alone, an estimated 30 million Americans are occasional users, while 6-8 million do it regularly. Although these numbers obviously do not translate into direct volume proportion, one can still say with assurity that, if we can bring about significant reductions in cocaine consumption within that so-called recreational user group, which represents approximately 80% of all users, then we can finally make a serious dent in a major facet of the drug market.

Mr. Bennett will also recommend to the President which areas in the country should be designated as high-intensity trafficking regions. I have been working closely with State Attorney General Warren Price in seeking such a designation for Hawaii. This would result in an extensive increase in federal assistance and the infusion of more funds into the State.

The forthcoming decision on this matter will be critical for us, and I can give you a recent example of why that is so. Although one might say it was a moral victory of sorts during a period of severe budgetary restraint, the House just approved level funding (the same as last fiscal year) for the Drug Control and System Improvement program. In FY89, Hawaii received \$903,000 through its block and formula grants and another \$250,000 for marijuana eradication through competitive discretionary grants. However, unless we are selected to receive special, additional support, we cannot hope to make the inroads we need to in solving an ever-escalating problem.

Finally, with respect to the issue of assault weapons, I continue to look to the law enforcement community for guidance. The message I have been getting loud and clear is that we cannot let our law enforcement officers be outgunned by the criminal element of our society.

This is why I support legislation to restrict the sale of both imported and domestically produced semi-automatic assault weapons.

As we all know, several months ago, President Bush banned the sale of imported assault weapons. Shortly thereafter, Secretary Brady came before my Appropriations Subcommittee on Treasury, Postal Service and General Government. I asked the Treasury Secretary which domestically made weapons fit the same characteristics as those of the prohibited imports.

Brady provided me with a list of 17 U.S.-produced firearms that would be proscribed were they of foreign manufacture. My response was that the restriction should then equally apply and that I would work to see that it does. The Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime is now preparing legislation along those very lines, and I have promised to support them in that effort.

In closing, I would like to take a look beyond what we all know are simply the symptomatic problems with which every one of you must deal on a daily basis. The fact that we need to build more prisons or require stiffer penalties or get more drug enforcement money or control the availability of weapons is only a reflection of a broader, more profound malaise -- lack of quality education for our

young people, poverty in a land of plenty and a breakdown of moral values.

As you all know full well, the key to winning the war on crime is eliminating the root causes of criminal development. And for the selfless contributions you make to those ends, I heartily applaud you. Our law enforcement people are too seldom recognized for their official achievements and even less often noted for the immeasurable time they invest in enriching the lives of our youngsters.

Well, I would like to say to you now, "Thank you!" -- not as a member of Congress, but as a husband, a father and a grandfather. You do not simply uphold the law and protect our society. You stand as true role models, inspiring our children to seek productive and responsible lives.

Uplifting our Nation's young people is our greatest challenge and our most important task. And it is an endeavor that is well-served by everyone here today. God bless you all.