

Chronological: John Howard Association

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JOHN HOWARD ASSOCIATION
23rd Annual Meeting
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Speaker: Senator Daniel K. Inouye

Two weeks ago, when I discussed this speech assignment with the members of my staff, one member looked at me quite puzzled and says, "Are you going to spend time with that bunch of do-gooders?" I don't know whether he said that in jest of seriousness but I suppose there are many in the State of Hawaii who may have been inclined to look upon the John Howard Association as an organization of do-gooders. Especially at a time when crime in Hawaii is the headline driving issue of the day. New York Times, the Wall St. Journal and now, the Time magazine will feature crime in Hawaii as the lead article. There are people who would say, "How could anyone with good sense or any sensibility gather to express their concern about ex-convicts?" Well, we're gathered here as far as I'm concerned because we are concerned about crime in Hawaii. And we are concerned about the victims of these crimes. But we are willing to do something about this situation besides just talk. And yes, we are concerned about the ex-convict, about the convict himself because unlike some, we don't believe that they should be treated like animals.

I remember when I returned from law school, back in 1952, soon after my bar examination results were made known. Mayor John Wilson called me in and says, "I got a job for you." "Sir, what can I do for you?" He says, "We got a slot open in the Prosecutor's office - no. 14." There were 14 prosecutors - I was no. 14. I said I will take the job for one year. Well, the first month everything went along well. I was winning all the cases and sending them off to Iwilei. Then I thought the time had come for me to visit Iwilei. I don't think too many of you know where the Iwilei prison was. I went there and to my horror, I realized that this was

built during the days of the kingdom, built to house 200 and we were housing 500. I could tell you the details of what the situation was like there. But after that I found it extremely difficult to recommend the prison in Iwilei.

And then some of you may know in 1955, or soon after the territorial session began, as a result of a radio program that the Oahu Prison inmates used to have and they were looking for volunteers, I responded. Those were my happy times. I was a volunteer worker at the prison. But the warden insisted that I be given a title so I was given the fancy title of Director of the Office of Prisoner Orientation. Which meant every two weeks, I'd go there and give lectures.

But I'm not here to talk about what happened in the past. I believe that most of us consider the John Howard Association as a crime prevention organization. At least I'll like to look upon it that way. Because most of us are very pragmatic people. For example, I believe that it is less costly to assist an ex-convict to find a job than to do nothing and send him back to prison. Incidentally, if you didn't know what the present day cost is; it costs us the taxpayers of Hawaii, \$17,000 to keep one person in the Oahu prison system. Now, that's a lot of money. It also costs countless dollars over double that for crime prevention. So the work that we are doing in this association is not only crime prevention; it's a cost efficient program. So with a rehabilitated ex-convict, I think we pride ourselves in knowing that we have achieved less crime, less misery for our victims, less property damage and loss.

It might interest you to know that the rate of recidivism in Hawaii is the lowest in the nation. And I would like to believe that the John Howard Association has played a role in keeping this rate low. In 1978, the rate of recidivism was 21%. In other words, 21% of those who were out, came back. In 1979, 19% of the prison population were second timers. In 1980, that's last year, just 16%. Compare this

to the Federal prison, it's 25% average. If you compare this to the other 49 states, you will find that the next lowest is 25% all the way up to 70%. At the time the John Howard Association was created in Hawaii, our rate of recidivism as far as I can recall was about 12%.

We have one attitude in Hawaii that is not found too readily in other parts of the nation. And that is the family unit. The study that we had made indicated that most of the men and women who were returned to society were received by their families. This may not be the situation in many communities.

In line with the precedent set by the President of this organization, I'll try to keep my remarks brief. So, I'll go to some of my final thoughts. We often times tend to divide our society or our community into opposing groups or opposing categories. The rich vs. poor; white vs. black; non-prisoners vs. prisoners. Put another way, good people vs. bad people. We look upon all those who have been in prison or out of prison as bad people. Those of us who are on the outside, we're good people. I think if we're honest with ourselves, I think we would admit to ourselves that most of us at one time or another have committed a crime or several crimes, and some of them felonious crimes. And so the only major difference between the so called good people and bad people is that the bad people got caught. They weren't as lucky as us good people. For example, how many of us have driven an automobile under the influence of alcohol? All studies indicate very many. And if you were so unlucky as to hit someone or get into an accident and your passenger or someone else got killed that's negligent homicide, a felony. So you would be spending time in Oahu prison and you become a bad person. But it seems according to studies, most of us are lucky and so we are able to get home in that drunken stupor. And we are able to look down at the bad people and curse them out. How

many have either cheated or have been tempted to cheat in filing insurance claims? According to studies, they say it's almost every person who files an insurance claim cheats. Incidentally, that is a crime. That could be a felony in some cases. How many of us have filed and cheated with the Internal Revenue tax returns? Let's think about that. That's a federal crime. But most of us don't get caught so we pride ourselves as being good people. Well, if you're not quite concerned, whether to support the John Howard Association and I suppose some of you are just visiting with us. I think you should ask yourself this question. If your luck ran out and you were caught, would you want an organization like the John Howard Association supporting you or supporting your rehab efforts, assisting you in making your return to society a bit easier? If your answer is yes, you're at the right meeting. Thank you very much.