

ON IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF LAW ENFORCEMENT
IN NORTH CAROLINA - #2

Speech by Robert Morgan
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Wilson Civic Clubs
February 13, 1969

It is certainly a pleasure for me to be here with you tonight as you pay tribute to law enforcement officials in your town and county. It is good that civic organizations such as those you represent have set aside this week and this night to honor the members of one of our most honorable professions and to remind all of our people of the sacrifices being made daily by the men and women we salute here tonight.

Too many of our fellow citizens today seem to be taking the attitude that though people should be concerned about the rising crime rate and increasing disrespect for law, any action on behalf of better law enforcement should come from Government. "Let Government do it," they say.

I think that by your presence here tonight you believe that the individual citizen has a duty to do something about

the increasing crime rate also. I think you see the problems of crime prevention and more effective law enforcement as requiring the joint efforts of government and private citizens, such as yourselves acting individually and through active and influential organizations such as those here in the Wilson Community.

In my opinion, we twentieth century North Carolinians-- we twentieth century Americans--too often are prone to say, "Let Government do it" and then feel that we have fulfilled our personal obligations. We obviously have greater obligations and if we fail to live up to those obligations, we have little right to complain of "Big Government" and loss of local perogatives.

I believe strongly in State's rights, in the active participation of the people in solving mutual problems, but I

also believe that State's rights are for responsible States. So it is refreshing for me to see you here tonight, by your very presence saying "I am not willing to leave the task to Government alone. I want to do my share."

It almost goes without saying, that people today more than ever before are concerned about the problems of law enforcement, crime prevention, and the responsibility of the people to help make the law enforcement officer's job easier and more effective. But are we concerned enough to be moved to action?

Are we serious enough about wanting to prevent crime to want to do more than merely sport a bumper sticker saying "Support Your Local Police?" Are we serious enough to want to more than merely tell our children that policemen aren't really such bad guys after all?

I believe we are. I believe that for the first time in a long while the citizens of North Carolina, and local

towns and counties are serious enough to want to do more--to in fact do more--to curb the rising crime rate, to make sure that the law is obeyed, and that justice is available to all of our people.

And we as citizens must do more if we are to meet the challenge of this day, just as the leaders in your State Government must do more, for as Governor Scott stated in his inagural message, "A government that is unable to afford all of its citizens the security of person and property is not likely to be able to do much more for them."

As the chief legal officer in this State, I recognize the immensity of the task which faces those of us you have placed in positions of leadership in your State Government, and I recognize the necessity for arousing the interest and active support of citizens in every town and county in our State.

But how do we as citizens begin this job---how do we at this late date begin to curb the rising tide of crime in North Carolina?

I believe that one good place to begin is by providing the support which law enforcement so desperately needs and must have if we are to feel safe to carry on our daily activities in safety and security.

We can begin by looking at the situation as it now exists. We must begin by realizing that we as citizens of our towns and counties send out men to perform the most dangerous duties in our society---duties which mean the difference between safety and danger for us and our families -- and that we send them often with inadequate equipment and without the training they want and need.

We do so without remembering that recent court decisions have made law enforcement more difficult than it once was and that now only the most modern equipment and competent instruction are sufficient to help them bring the criminal to justice. For today the slightest mistake can set a criminal free to walk the streets again.

We send these officers out to stand between us and the criminal element of our society without first making sure that we have obtained the best possible men for the job by offering attractive wages and compensating them for overtime service. We ask them to make unbelievable sacrifices -- which they willingly do -- while at the same time we hold tight the public purse strings and deny them even reasonable compensation for their services. In my opinion, this is neither fair nor reasonable.

We send our law enforcement officers out to perform tasks which involve great personal danger, to do things we would be afraid to do ourselves. We ask wives to allow their husbands to serve as our protectors, and children to allow their fathers to enforce the laws which are safeguards for all of us. But what security do we provide for them in case that husband or father is killed or seriously injured while serving in our behalf?

Often very little. A meager pension plan and a little accident insurance and we think we have adequately provided for the law officer's family. But we have not. We have done so very little to provide the law enforcement officer with fringe benefits, with life and accident insurance and retirement plans to insure his family they will continue to live comfortably should their breadwinner no longer be able to provide for them. We must surely do better if we are to do more than just give lip

service to our concern for preventing crime and ensuring law and justice for all our people.

We talk about supporting our police and increasing respect for the law while we at the same time show disrespect by violating traffic laws and being dishonest in our business practices -- often in the presence of our children who can hardly be blamed for later following the example we have set. We forget that our actions speak so much louder than our words.

So we have to stop talking about respecting the law in one breath and breaking the law in another. We have to show that we respect the law ourselves by actually obeying the law--- and expecting, indeed demanding, that others do also.

We Americans say we are proud of the fact that we are a nation of laws and not of men. But do we really believe this?

How can we say we believe this when we ourselves choose to obey some laws--most of us wouldn't steal our neighbor's car or shoot him if ne makes us mad--but at the same time we feel we can ignore traffic laws, cheat on our income tax returns, or fudge a little when dealing with our business associates.

Although respect for the law has declined, dedication to the principles of law and justice is today more important than ever before, for as one judge recently put it, "Until recently, we had little reason to worry about the completeness of this Nation's dedication to our system of law. We believed that the people of this country accepted as an article of faith the duty to obey the law. We believed that obedience to the law was an essential of self-respecting behavior. We thought that deliberate law violation and violence were confined to hoodlums and outlaws."

"We had not seen in this nation and had no reason to expect to see circumstances in which parents, teachers, and thousands and millions of citizens commended lawlessness as a way of achieving educational and social goals. It was a tacit article of faith that lawlessness was not respectable, and that everybody agreed this was so."

But we know now that this is no longer true. Disrespect for the law has become widespread and is being preached from street corners and by-ways throughout our State and Nation. Violence and deliberate violations of the law are accepted tactics by some groups and many of our citizens have given their silent consent and even commended this action. Needless to say, law enforcement is weakened by such conduct and the job of the law enforcement officer is made more difficult and often impossible. We must reverse this trend, and we must do so immediately.

As citizens we must demand strict, but fair, enforcement of all our laws. This State and Nation of ours must in fact be one of laws and not of men. And as we do so, we must be serious in our support for law enforcement officials and act positively and affirmatively to enable them to do a better job for us. "Support your local police" must become more than merely a slogan on our car bumpers if we are to work together to prevent crime in our State.

We have talked briefly about how private citizens can help prevent crime by increasing their support for law enforcement officers. Now let us look for a moment at what we in State Government can do.

I will try to be brief, for many of you already have heard my proposals. I have proposed to begin by putting greater emphasis on the problems of teenagers, by instituting a program in the public schools to actually teach our young people what

the laws are which we expect them to obey. We have proposed a summer youth conference where we hope to bring together student leaders from throughout the State to examine the common problems of juvenile crime and try to work out solutions to carry back to their home communities, their schools, their churches and their civic organizations.

We have proposed to strengthen substantially the size and effectiveness of the State Bureau of Investigation, thus providing local law enforcement officers with the expert technical and investigative services they so desperately need to deal with modern criminal and the soaring crime rate.

Our State Bureau of Investigation must have a narcotics squad, specially trained to apprehend those who are preying on our people, introducing them and addicting

them to dangerous drugs which so easily destroy the health, minds and lives of our citizens, especially our young people.

Those of us who have been intrusted with high public office must use the influence of those offices to convince those who would flaunt the law that crime, violence and lawlessness are impermissable and will not be tolerated.

Our new Governor also has made strong positive recommendations concerning the prevention of crime and the maintenance of law and justice. He has called for the prompt establishment of a police information network designed to link the State, National, and all local law enforcement agencies willing to participate into a high-speed, computerized network for the collection, organization and retrieval of information on crime and criminals. I support this idea wholeheartedly.

He has proposed legislation to strengthen the authority of local governments to deal promptly and effectively with civil disorders.

He has proposed legislation to help school administrators deal more effectively with those who attempt to disrupt the normal operation of those institutions and disrupt the educational process.

With us, he has called for a coordinated plan for the training plan for all law enforcement officers in the State, and perhaps eventually the establishment of a training academy.

And he has called for much more to ensure that all of our people are treated justly and that every person and his property are made secure.

So the task of preventing crime and promoting law and justice is a joint venture of government and private citizens. And I believe that the citizens of North Carolina and the officials they have elected to serve them are today ready, as never before, to begin that venture.