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NEWS

U. S. SENATOR FOR KANSAS

FROM:

SENATE REPUBLICAN LEADER

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CRIME BILL

TOUGH CRIME BILL SHOULD MATCH TOUGH RHETORIC: **WILL THE HOUSE FOLLOW SENATE'S LEAD?**

Later this week, the House of Representatives will finally begin deliberations on anticrime legislation. As the House begins its work, the American people should ask themselves some important questions:

Will the House pass a bill that devotes sufficient resources to incarceration? Last year, the Senate adopted legislation that earmarked \$6.5 billion for various forms of incarceration, including \$3 billion to build and operate ten new regional prisons for the most violent offenders. Will the House match this effort, recognizing that a violent criminal kept behind bars will not terrorize a single law-abiding citizen?

Will the House follow the Senate's lead and take steps to slam shut the revolving prison door by promoting truth-in-sentencing. When it comes to violent criminals, a 15-year sentence should mean just that--15 years. Not 5 years or 10 years. But the full sentence...no exceptions and no parole.

Will the House pass a bill that stops the endless appeals that clog the court system and do so much to erode public confidence in our system of justice? Or will the House make these appeals easier, allowing criminals to escape justice by taking advantage of yet more loopholes and more technicalities?

Will the House bill recognize that youthful offenders who commit a violent crime have forsaken their innocence and must be held accountable for their actions--as adults?

And perhaps most fundamentally, will the House pass a bill that properly views society as the victim of criminals, and not the other way around?

Administration's Actions Don't Always Match Rhetoric

Today, President Clinton is out promoting the "Administration's Crime Bill," even though the Administration has not drafted a crime bill, relying instead on Democrats in the Senate and House to do the legislative heavy-lifting.

If the President really wants to make a difference in the crime debate this week, he would today--publicly and unequivocally--endorse the proposed House Republican amendment earmarking \$10 billion for new prison construction and operation. Under this amendment, only those states that adopt the truth-in-sentencing and three-strikes-and-you're-out reforms would be eligible for the new prison money. Needless to say, this is one tough-on-crime proposal that lives up to its billing, and the President should get behind it.

Unfortunately, it's becoming increasingly clear that the Administration's actions don't always match its tough rhetoric.

The President talks tough about locking up violent offenders. Yet the Administration's 1995 budget actually slashes funding for federal prison construction by 29%.

The President talks tough about helping law enforcement. Yet the Administration's 1995 budget reduces law enforcement block grants by a staggering \$500 million and eliminates more than 1,000 permanent positions in the F.B.I., the D.E.A., the Justice Department's criminal division, and the U.S. Attorney's offices.

Three Strikes & Maybe You're Out?

The President says that he wants to stiffen criminal penalties and supports three-strikes-and-you're out. Yet his Attorney General has told federal prosecutors they may ignore charging defendants with crimes carrying mandatory minimum sentences if, in their subjective view, these sentences would be unreasonable.

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This directive reverses the guidelines established by Attorney General Thornburgh, which required prosecutors to charge defendants with the most serious and readily provable offense.

So, the American people should ask the President: does he mean three-strikes-and-you're-out? Or three-strikes-and-maybe-perhaps-you're-out...And only if the Justice Department lawyers think that life imprisonment is a reasonable sentence?

War On Drugs: Rhetoric vs. Reality

And let's look at the Administration's so-called war on drugs. The President talks tough, yet funding for the Office of National Drug Control Policy is slashed by 94%, the Department of Justice cites phony constitutional concerns when opposing the death penalty for vicious drug kingpins, funding for drug interdiction is severely reduced, and the United States Surgeon General tours the country promoting the misguided idea of legalizing the very thing we're trying to stigmatize--the use of illegal drugs, particularly by our young people.

The sad truth is that no community is safe in America today. And, unfortunately, no crime bill can guarantee security for the American people. While the Senate-passed crime bill is a small step in the war against crime, it is nonetheless a step in the right direction. The House should do no less.

The American people don't want gimmicks. They don't want false promises. But they do deserve the toughest crime bill possible, one that matches the tough rhetoric emanating from both sides of the aisle here in Congress and from both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue. We will soon see if the House of Representatives is up to the challenge.

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Remarks delivered on the Senate floor, approximately 1:35 pm ET.