

Address of

ATTORNEY GENERAL EDWIN MEESE III

before the

Washington Press Club

(including question-and-answer session)

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ATTORNEY GENERAL MEESE: I appreciate the opportunity to be here and to make this first principal public speech after being installed as the Attorney General here to the Washington Press Club.

As you point out, it has been thirteen months, but, if you look at it a different way, I was nominated in January, confirmed in February, and I am here in March.

I do intend, as I have indicated, to have an open administration of the Department of Justice, because I feel that it is important that we are able to communicate with each other, you and the news media and those of us in the Department of Justice, and, through you, to the people of this country.

I want to use this opportunity to encourage your ideas on how a good relationship between me, as Attorney General, and our Department, on the one hand, can be maintained and established with you, the members of the news media.

I believe that we have a responsibility to get together to provide timely and accurate information to the public about the Department of Justice and its activities, as well as about the legal system.

We have a mutual interest, really, and a need for each other. The goals of the Justice Department and our activities must be vocal, and our policies must be clear. You must have ready access and prompt responses in your quest for information.

Sometimes there is a temptation in government to close up sources of information. I pledge to you my best efforts to avoid this temptation, to see that the Department avoids it, and rather to work cooperatively with you in the interests of providing better information to our citizens and, through that method, provide for a better electorate, and, we hope, for support on the part of the public for the policies and activities of the Department of Justice.

Last Thursday, at my installation, I listed my basic goals for the Department of Justice. They included, first, the protection of the law-abiding from the lawless; secondly, the safeguarding of individual privacy from improper government intrusion; thirdly, the defense of the civil rights of all Americans; and, fourth, the promotion of legal and regulatory structures that are designed to conserve and expand economic freedom.

I am putting my watch here, because I know that

you are really all waiting to ask questions, and I don't want to overstay my welcome here with these brief remarks.

But I mentioned these four objectives because I think they encompass what I see as the principal task, in a general sense, of the Department of Justice, and for me as its leader in the future we have together.

Today I would like to amplify my discussion of these basic goals and priorities, as well as to talk briefly about other issues which I feel are important to our system of justice.

First of all, I think obviously a primary responsibility of the Department of Justice is to be a major player in the battle of society against crime. Crime and the fear of crime are of paramount concern to the people of our nation. You need only look back at the Goetz affair in New York or at some of the other incidents that have taken place around our country to see that this is a pervasive aspect of our society.

In the past three years we have made remarkable progress for the first time in history going for three consecutive years where each year there has been a decrease in the crime rate. And yet the fear of crime,

according to public opinion polls, is as great as ever.

Therefore there is an obligation of all levels of government to make this one of our principal priorities, because protecting citizens against crime, as well as protecting them against foreign aggression, are the twin primary responsibilities of any civilized government.

Now, first of all, I think we ought to make it clear that the prevention and control of crime is primarily the responsibility of state and local government, but, at the same time, we recognize that there is a definite Federal role. And I think one of the things that has happened in the past is this role has been somewhat confused, or the separation of these roles. So I would like to spell out what I view as the Federal role in the battle against crime.

First of all, there is a definite Federal responsibility to handle those crimes that are of an international or interstate character, which necessarily local government, local law enforcement agencies, cannot handle within their own respective jurisdictions.

Secondly, there is a responsibility to provide national leadership in the advocacy of good policies, in

the advocacy of adequate resources, in the mobilization of public opinion, and in encouraging new ideas as well as new methods of fighting crime.

Thirdly, there is a definite Federal responsibility to support and assist local law enforcement. We do this through our centralized collection of research, through our centralized statistical activities. We do it through the training facilities that we have at Quantico, Virginia, under the auspices of the FBI, and at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center at Glynco, Georgia, where we have recently inaugurated a series of courses in specialized subjects for local law enforcement personnel.

We provide some specialized services that would be too costly for each local law enforcement agency to have, such as the laboratory facilities and identification facilities that the FBI provides on a free basis throughout the country, as well as specialized teams, such as the explosives investigatory teams of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms.

And a fourth part of the Federal responsibility is cooperation in joint efforts with local law enforcement. We now have law enforcement coordinating councils in

virtually every Federal district where the U. S. Attorney works closely with local prosecutors, with local police agencies, to coordinate their efforts so that all levels of government can be more effective in dealing with criminal activities which often know no particular jurisdictional boundaries.

A major part of our work, of course, as I mentioned earlier when I talked about international and interstate crime--a major part of the work of the Federal government must necessarily be in the area of drugs and narcotics enforcement.

And this is one area where I would suggest that you can be of great help in getting out the message on this particular issue.

I would like to suggest that there are no neutrals in this country's war on drugs and organized crime. There are no bystanders. Everyone in this room who has a child, for example, must feel that uneasy dread that somehow drugs might affect your child or your child's friends. But we must do more than just feel apprehension; we must also act, and we must have an influence on others so that we change, in a sense, the way that some members of

society look at the whole problem of drugs.

There is a clear moral value that connects drug use and the many-faced tragedy of drugs. We have to announce that line, we must make people understand it.

In law enforcement great strides have been made on the supply side of the drug problem. Our organized crime and drug enforcement task forces have indicted over 4,000 top traffickers in drugs in the last three years. We have smashed traditional crime syndicates that have existed across the country, and we have sunk a lot of the trans-Atlantic drug trade. We are making real inroads in interdicting the supply of drugs coming in from a variety of countries, including Central America and the Caribbean, as well as from Asia. We have mobilized new resources and we have improved our ability to coordinate the Federal as well as the state and local law enforcement agencies that are working on the drug problem.

In the first three weeks of my term as Attorney General, even before my formal installation, I have already met with the Prime Minister of Italy to discuss the anti-drug effort and the cooperation between our two nations. I will meet soon with Colombian President Betancourt, who



will be here in this country, and we will be discussing how we can improve our cooperation with his country in stamping out drug trafficking.

And I am pleased to use this forum this noon to announce that on Friday of this week the Attorney General of Mexico will come here to Washington to meet with me and together we will begin in-depth discussions on this subject of drug trafficking, particularly the serious problems we have in Mexico at the present time. We will discuss how our two nations can expand our cooperative efforts so that we can fight both the drugs and the drug trafficking as well as the corruption which is often the result of those who do traffic in drugs.

These are some of the supply-side initiatives and some of the breakthroughs that we have made.

We have just convicted last weekend the first of the Colombians extradited to us on drug trafficking charges, and this was a major accomplishment here and another example of the cooperation between our countries.

These supply-side steps in the drug war are crucial, and we will keep them up.

But I would suggest to you today that there is

also a demand side, and this is where getting information to the public becomes very important. We know that drug use is bad for people, and you have done a very good job in the various media that are represented here in communicating that message.

But there is a second message that has not come out as strongly, and I hope that you will help in getting this across also. I intend to spend a lot of time in the future talking to the individual drug-user or those who might become drug-users in the future. I want him or her to understand the moral responsibility that they bear. Perhaps he or she is not an habitual user, perhaps he or she is not an addict--but anyone who is an active customer or a supporter of the networks that traffic in drugs must know that they are supporting those who deal in terror, torture, and death. They may think that they are just purchasing pleasure for themselves, but they are also wholesaling misery to millions of people who are oppressed by the drug trafficking.

Drug users in this country, by their very participation, are shipping profits to the people who tortured and ultimately executed drug enforcement agent Camarena in

Mexico within the past 30 days. They are abetting the thugs who, as we saw last year, thought nothing of enslaving, literally enslaving, thousands of poor Mexican peasants on a huge marijuana farm. And they are pumping dollars into organized crime families that, among their other distasteful businesses, deal in the pornography trade that traps, abuses, and ultimately disposes of thousands of our children.

You cannot separate one activity from the rest. Drug use is a part of a total seamless cloth that covers the underworld.

I believe that thousands of Americans will understand this message if it gets through, and will act to separate themselves from this blood trade. But the message must get through, and that is where you and I can work together.

People have to learn that there is no such thing as a harmless recreational drug, but it is a part of this greater evil that we are fighting.

I think it's an example of the value that your profession has been, and you deserve a great deal of credit when we consider what has happened in turning the tide on

drunk driving and the area of missing children. You took an interest in these areas, and the ink and the pictures flowed; the impact has been amazing.

I challenge you to work with us to do the same thing on drugs, to press hard on this story--and it is a real story. We hope that you will do some hard journalistic thinking and some hard journalistic writing and presenting. Connect the occasional cocaine user, for example, with the governments who support this trade. You have a great opportunity here to help with the type of criminal activity which is at the heart of most of the violence and most of the street crime that we experience in this country.

Another area where we will be working very hard is in regard to the victims of crime. We now have a new Federal law which provides for the Federal government to work with the states in providing compensation for crime victims, and also to provide facilities to assist people who have been victimized by criminal activity; assistance, for example, in serving as witnesses, assistance in getting recompense by insurance companies; and many other ways. So that the problem of the victim of crime can be somewhat alleviated so that they don't become a victim

twice, once at the hands of the criminal himself or herself and secondly at the hands of the system, which too often has been unthinking and uncaring when it comes to victims.

One subject that I feel deserves a lot of attention is the whole subject of prison reform. Cracking down on crime does not mean that we as a society should tolerate inhumane conditions in our prison system system. When a person has been sentenced to prison, he or she should be able to do their time without fear of attacks, without being turned out of prison in a worse shape psychologically or mentally or in terms of their attitudes towards society than when they went in.

And that is why I intend to make one of the principal goals of this administration prison reform, to work in the Federal system, which has already embarked on a path of progressive activity in regard to our prisons, but also to work with the states so that state and local correctional facilities likewise can be upgraded so that we can have adequate, humane correctional facilities to accommodate the number of people who should be in prison.

We have had the decrease in crime that I have talked about, and I am convinced that one of the reasons

for this decrease is that judges are sentencing more people who deserve to be in prison to be placed behind bars.

A decade or so ago it was commonplace that less than 10 percent of convicted felons in a jurisdiction would go to prison--these are people who have committed the most serious crimes. Today we have about 20 percent of the convicted felons are going to prison, almost double the amount years ago.

And because of that, because those who have committed habitual crimes, one crime after another, are staying in prison for longer periods of time, the surveys show that that is one of the major reasons for the decrease in the crime rate.

But in order to do that we have to have the facilities. We cannot have conditions whereas new prisoners are brought in one end of the prison system, other serious offenders who still should remain in prison have to be pushed out the other end because of the overcrowding.

In the past 25 years we have had a 435-percent increase in the number of serious offenses committed; we have had a 425-percent increase in the number of people arrested for serious offenses. But in this same period

of time we have only increased our prison facilities by about 71 percent--less than 20 percent, or a fifth, of the increase in the other categories. And most of this 71-percent increase in prison facilities has taken place in the last three years, since this problem has been recognized.

The Federal government has a responsibility to work with the states in many ways. First of all, I think it's important that we provide new ideas and a central clearinghouse or collection point for new ideas in the operation of prisons, so that we can do a better job.

Secondly, we have a responsibility and an opportunity to provide a clearinghouse for prison design and building plans. There is no reason that a new prison has to be an architectural wonder of the world; instead we can take off-the-shelf plans that can be readily available and state and local governments can then use these to build their prison and jail facilities. We are doing that now through our National Institute of Corrections. We are also finding ways in which prisons can be built at less cost to the taxpayer.

In California and Pennsylvania and many other

states, the administrations and the people are starting to build these new prison facilities, and we are learning a lot from this experience.

But there is no reason why a prison facility should cost \$100,000 per prisoner space in one area and \$30,000 or \$40,000 to build someplace else. Those are the kinds of things where we can provide assistance to states and local governments in the building of their facilities.

A third way we can provide assistance is by making Federal lands available for the construction of local and state prison facilities. Most people realize the need for new prisons but very few communities want to have them in their particular locality.

With the Federal government owning literally a third of the land mass in the United States, I am sure there are plenty of isolated areas where we can give the land to state and local governments so that they can have a place that is acceptable on which to build prison and jail facilities.

And a fourth area of prison reform and correctional reform generally is to do more work in evaluating



what happens, in helping judges to know the results of their sentences, in helping to provide better mechanisms for determining which people should be in prison and which people pose little or no risk to society when allowed to remain out on probation.

These are the kinds of ways in which we can work in partnership with state and local government at the Federal level in order to provide for this aspect of improving our criminal law.

Turning from crime, a second major area that I feel the Department of Justice has a principal responsibility to work on is to preserve and protect the constitutional system of government.

In this regard I consider the separation of powers very important. In the last several years there has been a continual blurring of the lines of demarcation between the separate branches of government. There has been a tendency particularly for Congress to dictate to the Executive Branch how it should carry out its executive decision-making and its functions.

In the Budget Acts there have been innumerable instances where floors have been placed on the number of

personnel that a department must have, or limitations and strictures placed upon the way in which a department should be organized or carry out its responsibilities.

I think we have to do a great deal of cooperative work with the Congress to re-establish the clear lines that separate these branches so that there is not this confusion between those who make the policy and those who carry out the policy, between what is essentially a legislative task of decision-making and what ought to be left to the Executive Branch to implement the policies made by Congress.

Likewise I feel that just as there has to be horizontally care given to the separation of the branches of the Federal government, there must also be clearcut lines and increasing care given to those lines that separate the vertical levels of government.

The Tenth Amendment, which reserves all powers that are not specifically granted to the Federal government to remain with the states and the people themselves, is a vital part of the Bill of Rights. And it must be preserved and protected as vigorously as we do any other amendment or the Constitution itself.

We are concerned therefore that the states remain

the laboratories for change that was envisioned by the framers of the Constitution.

Justice O'Connor pointed out in one of her opinions that it was Wyoming that extended the vote to women 30 years before the country as a whole did; it was Wisconsin that came up with an innovative method of unemployment insurance; and it was Massachusetts that first devised minimum wage laws for women and children.

We are very much dedicated to the proposition that the states as innovators of creative policies must not be forced to march to a Federal tune or become mere arms of the Federal bureaucracy.

Turning from that to the implementation of the policies of the government, we are also concerned with the accountability as a principle of politics, and as policies are enunciated at the state and local level, their state and local officials, those who are easiest to control and to have access to by the people, will become unaccountable if all they do is carry out Federal policies. If Washington calls the shots, then why vote for local officials at all?

These are the substance of our Tenth Amendment

concerns, and these will occupy an increasing amount of our attention in the years and months ahead.

Another area that I think deserves more attention perhaps from the news media than it normally gets concerns the impact of the law on economic policy. The law too often is a deciding factor if economic growth will occur. The antitrust laws, for example, loom over every combination and merger. Regulatory regimes clamp onto new and struggling businesses, and they are in place even before new owners and new operators begin these businesses. The combination of these laws can either hamper the development of new economic growth in our country or they can provide a pathway and clearcut guidelines so that entrepreneurs in this country can build new businesses, employ new people, produce new goods and services, and add to the overall economic wellbeing of the country on the basis of clear laws and a minimum of government regulation.

It is the latter that we certainly favor, and we will continue to press for sound laws that nurture this type of economic growth.

And here again I think the Department of Justice, in advocating regulatory reform, both in legislation and

in carefully scrutinizing regulations, can play a major part in the ongoing policies of this Administration and the ultimate welfare and benefit of the country.

And, fourth and finally, I would like to talk a little bit about the responsibility of the Department for improving the legal system of our country. There are many problems now that beset the Federal judiciary. We recently had a conference at Williamsburg just two weeks ago in which the Chief Justice of the United States, justices representing every level of Federal and state courts, members of the Judiciary Committees of the House and the Senate, and representatives of the Justice Department, discussed what's ahead for the Federal courts.

There are many problems that occur largely because the line between the Federal judicial system and the state judicial system is continually blurred, just as it is in the other aspects of policy-making that I discussed earlier.

Furthermore, one of the difficulties is that every time Congress passes a new Federal law with criminal penalties or providing new authority to the Federal government or creating a new Federal cause of action,

there is a new impact upon the Federal justice system. We think that several things can be done. One of them is that the Department of Justice, working with the Office of Management and Budget, can provide to Congress a justice system impact statement so that when they are looking at these laws we can give them information about just what the impact will be in terms of additional resources needed within the Executive Branch, the impact on our Federal correctional system, as well as the impact on the Federal courts.

But this will help to restrain the growth of Federal power and authority and continue a balance between what is done at the Federal level, that which is necessary for truly national problems, and that which ought to be reserved to the states, which have the primary responsibility for setting the laws and the regulations that govern the everyday activities of life.

Another way in which we can help with the legal system is to work with the professional associations of this country in restoring respect for the legal profession and for the judicial system.

On the one hand, people worry that the courts

do not protect them against crime; on the other hand, people are concerned about the ethics, the competence, and the financial aspects of legal services. We feel that we can work with the legal profession to improve the situation in a number of ways.

One of the ways is to expand legal services for the poor. I have seen in my professional lifetime, a little over a quarter of a century, have seen the professional bar abdicate its responsibility for legal services to the poor because government took over. We have a Legal Services Corporation that has had many problems in the past. The handling of this corporation is getting better under the leadership that is presently there.

But whether under good leadership or bad, or no matter what policies it may pursue, the Legal Services Corporation or any taxpayer-funded mechanism is not going to provide adequate legal services to take care of the needs of all the poor.

That is why I say we have to come up with creative, innovative activities and ideas which will draw together the legal profession and the law schools of this country so that we can provide legal services for

the poor in a way that will also enhance legal education, improve the skill and the integrity of lawyers, and add to the reputation of both the legal profession and our judicial system.

And, finally, in terms of the legal system, the Department of Justice has a very important responsibility in finding the best possible candidates for Federal judgeships so that they can be recommended to the President for nomination to these posts.

We will do this with careful scrutiny, in consultation with professional associations as well as with local lawyers and local legal organizations. We want to find the best possible people to fill the positions on our Federal bench so that we will have a judiciary which is dedicated to the preservation of constitutional principles, which understands restraint in their handling of the tremendous power that the judiciary possesses, and who will carry out a program of sound judicial decision-making which will be in the interests and benefit of all of our country.

Well, I want to close by saying that my remarks today, I hope, will not be regarded by you,



particularly as they pertain to your profession, as rhetoric. My appeal for a good relationship is not a velvet glove. We can work together without either of us co-opting the other. We may argue at times, we will sometimes disagree, but we can do this with civility, mindful that each of us has a responsibility to the public which is important and sincerely held.

Our mutual goal is to do justice to our many tasks. We can work together in good faith and with good will.

I look forward to these exchanges. I hope this meeting today will be the first of many that I have with your organization as well as with other professional media organizations, and I hope that through this we will develop friendships and cooperative efforts on the nation's behalf.

Thank you for inviting me here today.

(Applause)

QUESTION: Mr. Attorney General, will the Administration press for immigration legislation again this year, and if so, will it be a comprehensive package that includes employer sanctions and amnesty?

Or will it be some sort of a scaled-down version?

ATTORNEY GENERAL MEESE: We are very much interested in pursuing immigration legislation this year, because the problems that gave rise to the legislation last year have not changed. Indeed, perhaps they may have grown worse.

We are now in the process of talking with people in the Congress, as well as within the Executive Branch and developing the legislative package that will be sent to the Hill this year.

I expect to hear within a very short period of time the various options that we have. But no decisions on exactly what type of legislation will be presented have yet been made. We are looking for a reasonable and sensible non-discriminatory immigration reform and I would suggest that at least some of the aspects of last year's legislation will be repeated in the package this year.

But we don't know exactly its form and provisions.

QUESTION: Mr. Attorney General, this is going to take you back about five years.

A key element in the prosecution of Raymond Donovan, in the Bronx, is wiretap evidence from the telephone of William Maselli that was made by the FBI in 1979. The people, associates of Donovan, who had been overheard were informed about that in February of 1980.

My question to you is, were you aware, during the transition, in December of 1980 when you conducted some conversations with FBI Director Webster about the coming nomination of Donovan, were you aware of the wiretap evidence that implicated Donovan at that time?

And there will be a follow-up.

ATTORNEY GENERAL MEESE: No, I was not aware of any such wiretap evidence at that time. Or at any time was I personally made aware of any of it.

QUESTION: Well, in view of the fact, however, that you were involved in the transition and the nomination and conducted conversations with the FBI, since there are now requests from the Bronx District Attorney to the Justice Department for further cooperation, will

you recuse yourself from any of the decisions involved in the Donovan case?

ATTORNEY GENERAL MEESE: Well, none of those decisions have come to me as yet. I have determined that I will consider recusal on a case-by-case basis, if it should become an issue. And nothing has come to my attention yet which would cause me to make that decision so that I have not made it in the Donovan case.

QUESTION: Mr. Attorney General, Anne Burford, the former EPA Administrator, is pushing for reimbursement by the government of her legal fees, in connection with her resignation.

I think that they are in the neighborhood of about \$250,000. She said that when you were at the White House that you guaranteed that her legal fees in connection with her resignation, that process would be paid by the government.

Did you, indeed, make that promise to her?

ATTORNEY GENERAL MEESE: At the time that Mrs. Burford indicated she was planning to resign the issue of the legal fees came up because she was concerned about being reimbursed for the legal fees that she had incurred

because at a certain point, the Justice Department was no longer able to represent her. It was indicated at that time, that to the extent possible, the legal fees would be reimbursed and that by resigning, which she wanted to do, there would be no giving up of whatever right to reimbursement she might have.

This matter has been in the hands of Fred Fielding, the White House legal counsel, now for several weeks, and I am sure that it will be resolved at some time in the near future.

QUESTION: Was it you, personally, who did assure her of that?

ATTORNEY GENERAL MEESE: I am sure that at some point during the course of the period of time, in which she was tendering her resignation, I had a discussion with her on the subject.

But at no time was it ever a quid pro quo for her resignation or anything like that.

QUESTION: And my follow-up is this, that since you also have legal fees that you wish the government to repay, can you tell us why you think it is appropriate for the government to do this?

Because Mrs. Burford was acting on instruction from the President, as she indicated to the Senate, and you were having problems because of some of your own decisions, in the process of doing your job.

ATTORNEY GENERAL MEESE: Well, in both cases it is a matter of statute. There is a statute that says that in the case of Mrs. Burford, when the Justice Department is unable, because of a possible conflict, to represent an official of the government, then there is provision for that person to obtain outside counsel and to be reimbursed for the fees that are incurred thereby.

In my own case, in the case of the Ethics in Government Act, when an independent counsel is appointed and the circumstances are that a person is cleared of any wrongdoing, then there is provision in the law for that person to be reimbursed for any expenses, legal expenses and legal fees that have been incurred.

So it is a matter of statutory law in both cases. They are totally separate types of situations, but the law does provide for reimbursement in both cases.

QUESTION: In your discussion of trying to unblur the lines between Congressional and Executive

authority you, in a rather general way, challenged some of the laws that have been enacted by Congress, putting a floor on the number of people and the kinds of policies that will be put into effect.

Does that mean that the Justice Department, if it cannot persuade Congress to change the law, will simply not defend those laws when they are challenged in court?

ATTORNEY GENERAL MEESE: Well, basically the Justice Department has an obligation to defend laws, if when challenged in court, unless they are clearly unconstitutional.

And it is very rare when we would exert that responsibility. However, there are times when we must, in upholding the Constitution, not defend a particular law. However, many of the things that I am talking about are in bills, and budget items and so on and we will be very astute in calling these things to the attention to the President, and I would suspect that on occasion the veto may be more effective in bringing to the attention of the Congress, if they have otherwise ignored the constitutional aspects of these things, rather than later

on going into a court suit and not being to uphold it.

QUESTION: The follow-up question, you also indicated that you would be asking for a judicial impact statement, which has been a pet project of the Chief Justices for about 12 years, I think.

Did he specifically ask you for that?

ATTORNEY GENERAL MEESE: He mentioned it in the discussions that we had at Williamsburg and in the course of the development of this, we expanded the concept to look not only at the impact on the Federal Judiciary, but also to look at the impact of other aspects of the federal system, such as, U.S. Attorneys' offices, and the correctional system and so on.

QUESTION: Won't that cost a lot of money to make the impact statement?

ATTORNEY GENERAL MEESE: No, I don't think so. I think that it will save a lot of money.

I think that much of this information is readily available, I think that it is just a matter of putting it together in a comprehensive form and using that in our testimony.

We have to testify before Congress frequently,



as does the Office of Management and Budget, but there has not been a systematic look at what impact a new Federal law has on these various Federal agencies, and so I think in the long run it will save considerable funds.

QUESTION: You talked about the great strides that you have done in combatting drug trafficking.

Yet, Governor Cuomo has described the port area of New York as an open port, and that the Federal Government is not doing enough to interdict the incoming traffic.

Now, just what are you doing and how much, if any, do you plan to increase your efforts in that area?

And I have a follow-up.

ATTORNEY GENERAL MEESE: Well, actually the drug effort by the Federal Government has expanded so that we have more resources of the various parts of the Federal Government committed to interdicting the supply of drugs into this country than we ever have in the history of the country.

We have, in addition, better coordination of the traditional law enforcement agencies, such as

Customs, the Drug Enforcement Administration, we have added to that, increased resources of the Coast Guard, and we have now the Federal Bureau of Investigation working in the drug field, which is very appropriate since drug trafficking is so closely tied to organized crime.

We now, through an amendment to the Posse Comitatus law, three or four years ago, now have resources of the military services supporting law enforcement through the use of equipment, through satellite and radar surveillance and a variety of other means.

So, we really have much more involved in terms of resources thrown into this battle.

We also are working on an international basis, more effectively than ever before. Going to the countries of origin and trying to stop the narcotics at the source, both by eradicating the fields where these crops that are turned into narcotics are grown, by working cooperatively with those countries at the source to enforce the law against the traffickers within their boundaries and to provide an embargo against the narcotics leaving those countries.

So I would say that we are working with greater

effect as well as with greater resources than ever before.

I think that this has been indicated by the Police Commissioner of New York, for example, who has praised the cooperation that he has received from the Federal government, and by others who are knowledgeable about what the Federal Government is doing.

At the same time, there is a tremendous problem. We recognize that. And though we have made progress there is still a long way to go. But we will continue to--this is the one area of the budget, for example, that has had increases when most other departments have had decreases in the budget -- and we will continue this effort, a maximum effort on the part of the Federal Government to work with state and local law enforcement against drug trafficking.

QUESTION: Do you support a law to cut off U.S. aid to those countries that do not cooperate in restricting drug traffic?

ATTORNEY GENERAL MEESE: I would support a move where we think that would be effective. We think that in some cases that could be counterproductive, where we penalize a country and its people where the government

is actually trying to cooperate with us.

If there was a government that totally refused to cooperate and which, at the same time, was actively involved in promoting drug trafficking or giving aid and comfort to the traffickers, then I think that there might be situations in which it would be appropriate to exercise economic sanctions or to cut off aid.

QUESTION: Any countries in that line, in that area that you would care to name?

ATTORNEY GENERAL MEESE: Well, when we do it, we will announce them. But I think that really we have gotten record cooperation. I think that the fact that we have this extradition from Colombia, for example, and we have the cooperation from President Betancourt, these are examples of how cooperation is much more of a key to solving this problem than would be sanctions.

QUESTION: On the question of legal services for the poor, the efforts of the bar to obtain voluntary help from private attorneys has been relatively unsuccessful.

I wonder if you support mandatory measures by the bar to elicit support from private attorneys?

ATTORNEY GENERAL MEESE: I do not support mandatory

measures; I don't think anybody should be made to work in a particular area against their will. But I think that the reason that there has not been better success with voluntary programs is that they have been largely unimaginative, and have not really been sold to the lawyers.

I have made the suggestions in much more detail than I was able to because of time constraints today; for example, in a Law Day speech in San Diego County four years ago--and they have a very thriving program for lawyers participating on a voluntary basis in legal services for the poor there. I have talked with the American Trial Lawyers Association and they have agreed that they will take this up as a project.

And I think it's a matter of designing the programs so that there is benefit, professional benefit, for both the lawyers as well as practical benefits for the people who need the legal services.

And I think that there can be a whole variety of creative and innovative solutions to the legal services for the poor that will enlist the support of the practicing bar.

QUESTION: As far as LSC goes, do you still

support defunding of it? What impact would that have on provision of pro bono services?

ATTORNEY GENERAL MEESE: Well, this Administration has never promoted the total defunding of legal services. We have felt that the Legal Services Corporation is not the best vehicle. And, as I mentioned, it is getting better because there is new leadership now. But we feel that it would be far better to provide the grants directly to states or to state bar associations, for example, and let them develop the programs, using a certain amount of Federal funds as seed money for developing these broader professional programs to provide the legal services.

QUESTION: Mr. Attorney General, given the Supreme Court's decision yesterday in the draft registration case, what are your plans for resuming any prosecutions of the roughly 2 percent who haven't registered?

ATTORNEY GENERAL MEESE: Well, actually our purpose is not to prosecute; our purpose is to get people to register for the draft. And that is why every effort is exerted to try to obtain the registration, and prosecution is only used as a last resort.

As a matter of fact, in every case, before prosecution is even considered, we send Federal law enforcement officers to go out and find the people who have refused to register and counsel with them, suggesting that it would be to their best interests to register with the draft. And in most cases they do in fact register.

As a matter of fact, registration is approaching 99 percent of the age group, the estimated age group, in many of the age categories. So it has been very successful.

There are a few resisters who absolutely refuse to register. In those cases there is no course under the law but to continue with the prosecution. I understand there are some fifteen or twenty cases that are now pending and I am sure these prosecutions will go forward now that the Supreme Court has made clear that they are proper.

QUESTION: One follow-up, if I may. In the Camarena case, do you see any merit in the United States seeking the extradition of any judge responsible in Mexico?

ATTORNEY GENERAL MEESE: Well, I think right now that this is one of the things that we will be discussing, among others, with the Attorney General from

Mexico when he arrives here on Wednesday of this week. We will be talking about how we can cooperate with them and help them.

I would say that the best way would be for the Mexican authorities to invoke their own justice system in the handling of these cases. But we will be exploring with them any other ways in which we might see that justice is done in the Camarena case, as well as in the long-term problem of stamping out corruption and drug trafficking in Mexico.

QUESTION: Sir, would you explain your concerns about the Tenth Amendment and how you intend to implement your concerns? And do you mean to suggest by your examples that minimum wage and women's voting should have been left to the states?

ATTORNEY GENERAL MEESE: No, what I was explaining there, that often the states were leading the way for the Federal government. And obviously the right to vote, being a Federal right, and minimum wage laws being very much connected with interstate commerce, they are proper subjects for national attention.

But what I am saying is that if we take away



the incentive for states to pioneer solutions to social problems and merely make them administrative regions of the Federal government, we will cut off a tremendous source of creativity.

That is why in solving many social problems I think that authority should be left and functions should be left at the state level. We have many things that the Federal government does now that ought to be transferred to the states along with revenue to pay for them. The President has advocated that.

One thing, for example, that I hope in the near future will ultimately be given to the states is the maintenance and the entire handling of the highway program. Now that the interstate program is completed, it seems that the maintenance of that program could well be given to the states along with the gasoline tax revenues to support it.

Another area, for example, is right now the tax on cigarettes, a certain portion of the Federal amount of those taxes is going off. This would be a great opportunity for the states to pick up that amount of the tax for their own use for the matters at the state level that are most

important.

But it used to be that about a third of the tax dollar was collected and utilized by the Federal government and two-thirds by the states. Today that is just reversed. And I think there has to be some better balance between states on the one hand and the Federal government on the other in terms of both the obtaining of the tax dollar and the amount of power and control and authority that it uses.

QUESTION: Sir, if I may, what practical things do you think the Justice Department could do to implement that policy?

ATTORNEY GENERAL MEESE: Well, I think one of the things that we have is the advocacy and also calling attention as legislation is proposed to what the implications are for the states. But particularly I think we have, as the Department principally concerned with the protection and preservation of the Constitution--and I say that mindful of the fact that we are approaching the bicentennial of the Constitution--I think drawing public attention and advocating increased attention to the Tenth Amendment is a particularly important role that we can fulfill.

QUESTION: Last month your Office of Professional

Responsibility issued a report in which it said that in the Immigration and Naturalization Service there are problems with the upper management providing obstacles to pursuing allegations of corruption.

Yesterday, Alan Nelson, the head of the INS, called that report somewhat unfortunate and said it was orchestrated to sound as though there is major corruption when there really isn't.

Which side do you come down on in that?

ATTORNEY GENERAL MEESE: Well, I am not sure that the two statements are inconsistent. We have been very zealous within the Justice Department in paying a lot of attention to any condition which might give rise to any sort of corruption or wrongdoing on the part of the personnel of the Department. I think that is what the Office of Professional Responsibility was doing.

I think what Mr. Nelson was saying is that he hopes that this report, which is a warning, in effect, that some changes have to be made--and almost anything in government can be improved--would not give the impression that there is widespread corruption, because I don't think that that is the case in the Immigration and Naturalization

Service.

QUESTION: We asked him about specific changes that were made. He was unable to tell us of any. And we wonder if those changes are being made.

ATTORNEY GENERAL MEESE: Well, I am sure that the specific conditions that are mentioned in the report will get thorough consideration both by INS and by the rest of the management of the Department, and, if changes are necessary, they will be made. I myself have not personally reviewed that report yet, but I am sure it will be coming to me in the near future.

We have time for two more questions, I am informed.

QUESTION: Mr. Meese, we are told that the Justice Department has sent letters to some 45 parties to decrees which involve affirmative action plans including racial quotas, and that the implication there is that the Justice Department might want to go back into court and challenge those based on a recent Supreme Court decision and on the President's opposition to racial quotas.

Do you anticipate going back into court and attempting to reopen and challenge some of those affirmative action programs?

ATTORNEY GENERAL MEESE: Well, the Department was

required to do that because we are a party to those decrees in those 45 or so cases. And under the Supreme Court decision in the Stotts case, some of the provisions of those decrees are no longer proper, and therefore we had an obligation, the Department of Justice being a party to those decrees, to send these letters, and on a case-by-case basis we will be looking into whether or not it is obligatory upon us to go back into court to get those decrees changed to conform to the Supreme Court decision.

QUESTION: I don't understand that there is a Supreme Court decision that would require the reopening of racial quotas for either hiring or promotion. Of course, one decision did outlaw a court order that required racial quotas in lay-offs.

I am asking now about promotions and hiring. And racial quotas.

ATTORNEY GENERAL MEESE: The Stotts decision indicated that the quota system was wrong, that discriminating against people now because of past discrimination against others, unless the persons who were being helped were themselves victims of discrimination, was an improper use of the court system.

And since these court decrees are something to which the Justice Department was a party, we cannot allow them to go unexamined to see whether they are--whether the decrees which were approved by courts are in conflict with the Stotts decision. And that is the process which the Civil Rights Division is going through at the present time.

QUESTION: My question is, do you anticipate possibly challenging those, that is, quotas for hiring or promotion, in court?

ATTORNEY GENERAL MEESE: Well, it's not a matter of challenging as much as it is correcting. And to do so, and to correct them in a way that if there are improper quotas being used either in hiring or in promotion, changing the decrees to remove the offending provisions.

Last question.

QUESTION: Mr. Meese, while you were at the White House, you were very much involved with President Reagan's attack against news leaks and the subsequent national security directives that were issued by the White House.

Could you please tell us what your opinion is regarding the prosecution of journalists who print news

leaks and classified information, as opposed to those who leak it?

ATTORNEY GENERAL MEESE: I think it depends on the circumstances of the case. I think that--and I would hope that journalistic ethics would prevent people who have obtained what is in effect stolen property, stolen information, from utilizing this in a way that would compromise or hurt the national interest.

My overall view, however, is that we have far too much classified information in the Federal government. I think a lot of things that shouldn't be classified are, and therefore there is kind of a ho-hum attitude towards the protection of national security information.

What I would rather see is a tightening up on the classification of information so that only material that really has to be kept secret in the interests of national defense and national security is classified, and then that the news media, as well as government officials, work together to be sure that that information is not improperly disclosed.

I think that is ultimately the solution to this whole problem.

QUESTION: If I could follow up on two points, then.

What about the use of other laws, specifically the espionage statutes and the theft-of-government-property statutes, to prosecute journalists? And also do we imply from what you just said that you are going to reverse the previous Reagan Administration over-classification and try to bring some logic back to that?

ATTORNEY GENERAL MEESE: Well, actually the Reagan Administration is the first Administration in recent years that has had a decrease in classification. There has been something like 17 or 20 percent less amount of material classified by the Administration over the course of the last two years than had been existing previously.

So I think already what I have indicated is the policy of this Administration.

I think we can do even more.

As far as utilizing either the Espionage Act or the Theft of Government Property Act, I don't see quite how the circumstances would affect a news person as being prosecuted under those statutes. I think again the whole thing would depend upon the circumstances of a particular



incident.

I guess we have had the last question. Again, let me thank you all for the privilege of being with you today. I look forward to many opportunities to meet with all of you in the future.

(Applause)

(The meeting concluded at 1:59 p.m.)