McKeithen Asks

CRIME RATE CUT

Says End Restriction of Law Enforcers

Gov. John J. McKeithen called Thursday for the elimination of restrictions placed on law enforcement agencies and the courts by "unreasonable" Supreme Court decisions.

"If this requires a constitutional amendment, let us do that," said the state's chief executive at a luncheon meeting of the Federal Law Enforcement Association of New Orleans. Attended by some 100 association members, the affair was held in the Officers Club of the Naval Air Station in Belle Chase.

Warning that the uprising in crime poses as great a threat to America as communism, the governor reiterated his view that recent decisions by the U.S. Supreme Court are a major factor in the higher crime rate.

Counteracting these decisions would be a "vital step in coping with the crime problem," he said. Until an amendment can be passed, the governor suggested that legislation be obtained to help officials gather evidence necessary for criminal convictions.

PUBLIC SUPPORT URGED

He also recommended other ways to combat the crime increase by (1) strengthening public support of law enforcement officials; (2) improving techniques of detection through crime laboratories and data processing equipment; (3) upgrading the skills of law officers; (4) enabling the courts to operate quickly and efficiently the caseloads before them, and (5) enlisting the aid of experts in the field of criminal investigation and prosecution.

He cited an instance of progress which Louisiana has experienced recently. "The state has done much in upgrading our law enforcement officers through The Law Enforcement Training Institute at Louisiana State University, which has graduated more than 10,000 officers since its founding in 1933. If we are going to cope with the ingenuity of criminals, we must have skilled officers," he declared.

In spite of some advance, however, the governor said Louisiana and the rest of the nation are suffering from an upsurge in crime "that is absolutely appalling."

To emphasize his point, McKeithen said the crime rate is advancing six times faster than the population growth, the cost of crime to society is in the $20 billion a year range, and reported crimes against property and people have zoomed 50 per cent and 25 per cent, respectively, since 1959.

OTHER FACTORS MARKED

Although he labeled Supreme Court decisions as the major cause, the governor also credited other factors for the crime problem — public attitude, contempt for law, the divorce rate, broken homes, moral values, failure to recognize adequately the need for public safety and protection, the notion that the individual is entitled to complete freedom of movement and actions, and the encouragement of those who believe they have a right to disobey laws they consider unjust.

The governor said it was significant that the crime rates for most major law violations have risen "more sharply" since 1961, the year of the first Supreme Court decision on crime, than in the period 1959 through 1961.

He cited these examples: In 1959, the crime rate for robbery was 44.2 per 100,000 population. In 1961, it was 50.1 and in 1965 it was 67.1.

The crime rate for aggravated assault was 70 in 1959, rose to 72 in 1961 and 108 in 1965.

The rate for burglary was 393 in 1959, then 468 in 1961 and 633 in 1965.

The rates for murder and forcible rape were fairly steady through the period until 1964 and 1965 when they went up particularly in the rate for forcible rape which was nearly 50 per cent higher in 1965 than in 1963.

"HALTERS ON OFFICIALS"

In the period since 1961, McKeithen said the Supreme Court issued four decisions which "put halters on law enforcement officials in gathering evidence to convict criminals." For the record, he mentioned the cases of Escobedo vs. Illinois, Miranda vs. Arizona, Mapp vs. Ohio and Gideon vs. Wainwright.

Following his address, the governor was presented a plaque by Wallace Moll, FLEA coordinator and special investigator in charge of the Alcohol and Tobacco Tax Division of the Treasury Department, New Orleans. McKeithen was cited for his "valuable contributions" to law enforcement in the state of Louisiana, Moll said.

McKeithen arrived in New Orleans from Washington, D.C., where he addressed the National Broadcasters and Televeters Association earlier this week.

Part of that trip also was devoted to a trip to the Bureau of Public Roads, McKeithen said.

SEEKS ROAD FUNDS

The governor said he was seeking a reinstatement of funds for the highway program, which the government has decided to hold back. If anything, the program should be doubled or tripled, the governor said when interviewed here.

McKeithen said he emphasized to the bureau that Louisiana could not tolerate a delay in funds for its primary road system. He explained there was severe traffic congestion in New Orleans, Morgan City and between Baton Rouge and Shreveport.

The governor said Louisiana might have to finance the primary road construction itself because the state cannot wait for federal matching funds on the schedule now in effect.

---

Times-Picayune, March 10, 1967, p.1, c.6