

Crime and Business: Some Highlights of the Question and Answer Session

Mr. Davis:

Thank you very much, Joe. Now you've heard about the effects of crime on minority business. Let's get down to the business at hand. What do we do about it? That's what you all want to hear, I'm sure. Now, to get things started, I think I'll exercise another prerogative and pose the first question myself and throw it out to any member of the panel.

It's a two-part question — first of all, do you believe that the courts are too lenient on people who have committed crimes affecting business in the minority community and are apprehended? And, if so, do you feel that this lenient attitude has in any way affected or contributed to the increase in crime against minority business? Mr. Commissioner, would you like to respond?

Mr. Eaves:

I have to take the unpopular position, and that is, I do not believe that the courts are too lenient per se.

Speaker:

Not down in Georgia, we're talking about Boston.

Mr. Eaves:

Not even in Massachusetts. The solution is clearly not in just sentencing the individuals who are found guilty of committing a crime. Many times the courts have no alternative. If they were to send everybody who was proven guilty to jail, we would not have room in our institutions to hold them.

As taxpayers, we do not regard prisons as sexy items and as a result we do not support our penal institutions to the extent that we could in terms of adequate facilities, personnel, and finally programs to provide alternatives for those who are incarcerated.

Consequently, the judges are in a dilemma. Do you send a boy or a girl, or a young man or a young woman, to prison for a crime that is insignificant compared to other major crimes, only to have that person come out of prison a hardened criminal, one who is far more schooled in crime than he was when he went in?

I think the question is very complicated. If you are asking about sending criminals away, then the answer is, no, judges do not send enough people away. But if you're talking about a solution, then I think we'll have to be realistic about it: we have to look at the entire criminal justice system, we have to talk about prisons, the impact jail has. We have to be realistic enough to understand that 95 percent of those people come back into the community, and unless we send them to an institution that will provide alternatives when they return, they will be schooled in a world of crime far exceeding that which they knew when they went in, which is far more detrimental in the long run. So it's a Catch-22.

Mr. Calvey:

But at issue here is the effect of crime on business.

First, the hands of the police are tied — they can't run as fast as youngsters that are committing crimes today, right? It doesn't matter how elaborate a security system a businessman has — crimes will be attempted anyway. Then when the police come in, the youngsters will flee. The police can't fire a warning shot and they certainly can't catch them.

If we do catch one, he's taken up to the station and he's out on the street before we can clean up the mess of glass or wall or ceiling he's knocked down. When he appears before the judge, he is not considered to have committed a violent crime. Breaking and entering against a business is almost like a misdemeanor; after all, we are the "fat cats."

They don't know we have to break even. They don't know we pay ourselves last and we're outcasts if we don't pay our bills. Nobody cares about that. That's why I say, I didn't come here to make our shopping areas look bad because, as business people, we have the worst image, second only to the police. They regard us as "fat cats" who can afford to get our windows smashed. We can afford to be broken into two or three times a month until our insurance companies don't believe us. I think something else needs to be done. As business people, we don't have the power to do anything.

Mr. Davis

What do you think about the high rate of recidivism that we have? Do you think it would be lower if these people had been sent to jail in the first instance, rather than the 5th, 6th, or 7th time that they committed a crime? That's the first part. Secondly, what do you think about short sentences being the carrot that we hoped that they would be? For example, in England they believe in short hard sentences; in other words, it's not a bed of roses over there when you go to jail; it's not like Norfolk where you have a dormitory style facility and nearly everybody has a TV in his room and radio and what have you, and if you don't want to work, you don't. It's not that type of system in England. Wouldn't short hard sentences operate as a deterrent, which is what we actually need if we're going to

stem the rising tide of crime? The deterrent would not only be to the person himself, but to those who might want to follow. What do you say about that, Commissioner Eaves?

Mr. Eaves:

First of all, I want to set the record straight. Many of you may not know it but I did have a small business in Roxbury on Dudley Street. I was robbed on the average of once a month; I was put out of business by crime. I'd like to tell you two stories. First, my nephew was working in the store one evening and a guy came in and put a shotgun in his mouth and told him if he moved he would blow his head off. Meanwhile, his partner robbed the place and took out all the beer and wine he could and they took off. The police came and my nephew failed to give a description because he didn't want to turn a brother in.

The second one is, while I was Penal Commissioner of Deer Island, another fellow robbed my place and came one-eighth of an inch from killing my brother. That man became a wardee at Deer Island under my administration.

Thank God for the tax write-off, but still I was forced to close my business because of repeated robberies. So I have had the kind of pain and suffering that you're talking about. But the point that I was trying to make is that unless you're going to address the entire system, I don't believe that you can say that the judges are being too lenient. I think that their hands are tied because there's no place to send the criminals. If I were a judge, I would close Deer Island down before sending anybody there. It may have improved since I was Commissioner, but it was a place that I wouldn't want to spend the night in.

In reply to the question about why recidivism is too high, the answer is that everyone comes out believing that he can now commit the perfect crime because of all the discussion in prison of what went wrong. And everybody knows, "If I don't do A, I'm going to do B, if I don't do X and I don't do Y, when I go outside I can commit the perfect robbery." And then if he wants to go straight, he can't get a job, so he turns to the perfect crime so that he can hit and make it. But he gets caught, and he's sent back to prison.

I think what you need to do is try to put the guards and the correctional officers out of business. In Atlanta every day I sent more than 50 percent of the population out into the city. We were sending them back on work release programs, where they developed work skills so that they would be able to get a job when they got on the outside. We sent them out to educational release programs and also to therapeutic release centers for drug problems. We saw recidivism reduced more than 50 percent in two years. I am of the opinion that given the opportunity, the resources, and the personnel, correctional supervisors could make the difference. But until you put that kind of revenue in, until you give that kind of support to

those people, then the judges are in a dilemma: should they send them off and make hardened criminals out of them or allow the circle to continue as is.

Speaker:

That's all right for treating people, but in order to survive as businessmen, we have to think in dollars and cents. When people commit crimes upon a business, they put our businesses in the red because of theft and glass repair work. We don't have restitution in our ghetto courts. I don't want to see any youngster go to jail but I certainly would like to see him pay for the damage he creates. You know, these youngsters can throw a brick through a glass and create \$500 or \$600 damage.

It seems to me that Mr. Eaves infers that the penal system is unnecessary because prisons simply put more criminals on the street. Therefore, let us put anybody who is a criminal back on the street and supervise him and we'll solve crime. We have more police officers than we have criminal supervisors and they cannot solve the problems, so I don't see how that recommendation can really be the answer to the problem.

I would now like to ask a question of Commissioner Jordan. One, will the Boston police system set up a program of community training whereby police officers will be selected to go into the schools to give lectures on crime and crime prevention? Two, will the police department set up police-community relations programs? Such programs would include influential people within the community, such as priests, school teachers, leaders of business and various organizations, and establish a movement in the respective communities to deal with crime by augmenting the force of the police department with the activities of the community. Are you thinking along these lines and do you consider this a means for beginning to deal with the problems of crime in the respective communities?

Mr. Jordan:

I believe that the whole thrust of meetings such as this should be developed so that we can utilize to the fullest all the agencies that we possibly can bring to bear on this problem.

We must continue to look at the delivery of police service in the city of Boston, certainly in the minority areas as well as any other area. We have established an inspection team that comprises superior officers who will be constantly on the street monitoring the performance of our personnel, to see that they're responding to calls, that they're making the proper disposition of cases, and that they clear their calls so they're ready for the next one. We have a small group of police officers going out into the schools, talking to our youngsters — maybe that's something that really should be explored further. We also have a community service program by which we try to contact and keep some sort of rapport with the business community and the community leaders, trying to make them aware of our

mutual problems. But in many cases you deal with a very limited number of people — the same people come to all the meetings, the same business people are always concerned.

We're going to be in there trying to respond and to do our share to solve the overall problem. I think that there has to be a complete involvement here. That includes the business community, the police, the courts, the social agencies, and Youth Activity workers. By the way, that is a large organization that can really get in and work with some of these youngsters. Recreational facilities, all of these things have got to be brought to bear before our friend from the Dudley Street Merchants Association will feel that the city is responding to the needs of the minority businesses.

Speaker:

Something was said during that exchange that brought to mind the fact that whenever we see crowds of youth gathering on the corner or something, the first thing that comes into mind is that they're planning to hit someplace. Years ago if such activity were engaged in, the police officer would ride by and say, "Okay, Jack, get off the corner," and the kids would generally obey. Today the police officer cannot do that, and he cannot do it because of numerous Supreme Court decisions establishing constitutional rights under the First Amendment, freedom of association and so forth. So that it could well be that we have talked ourselves into something that we want to get out of now and find no way to extricate ourselves.

Jo Holley:

I understand that this workshop is about the effects of crime on minority businesses, and we've heard them expressed very well. Everybody knows I've been burglarized; I was put out of business, and I'm a businesswoman, not man.

As a businesswoman, I took time away from my business to come here because I felt that perhaps there would be some far-out solution or some kind of reward, some hope, or something that could come out of this workshop. Instead I keep hearing "I don't know the answers." So I want to offer what I feel may be part of the answer.

Number one — jobs, employment. People need; people want; people must survive. What are they going to do? They're going to break in; they're going to rob; they're going to snatch pocketbooks; they're going to do all these kinds of things. We want to put all the blame on the drug addict, but that is really not the case.

I have a young man in my school today who is trying to survive. He has no place to live, no job, and he's trying to go to school. I have been all over this city trying to find some resources for this young man. What's going to happen to him? He's going to rob. This young man needs help, but

everywhere I go, there is no help for him. He doesn't qualify. Multiply him by the thousands who are out there who must have help.

Number two — training. There are funds coming through this city geared mostly toward training for public service jobs, but after a year's employment, there's no hope. But there are many minority businesspeople who could employ three, four, or five of these young people if somehow or other some of that CETA money could come down into the community where it really needs to be.

Right now it is not working, and people like myself and Mr. Calvey have no input. For example, I have a building that's boarded up because of vandalism. In my area, you don't see a policeman. I have to call up and ask them, and then they'll send up a policeman for that one time. But we need police visibility. I'm not against policemen. I've been robbed so many times and felt sorry for the policeman because he couldn't catch the thieves.

What I am saying is that something has to come out of these meetings, more than just talking and trading ideas and opinions and observations. And I'd just like to have something positive come out of this.

Mr. Davis:

Jo, you have made us very painfully aware that we have the wrong people on this panel. I tell you why I say that. Because you have hit upon the solution to the problem, and there's not a single one of us up here that can do anything about it.

It all comes down to a matter of economics, as you have suggested. And I'm sure Commissioner Jordan is unable to tell you how you're going to be able to get more jobs out there in the community. I'm sure Mr. Eaves is not going to be able to do it. George Morrison has been trying, but none of us here is in a position to give any real insight whatsoever into that one solution which is absolutely critical. And I think there's no one here who would disagree with that.

Ken Guscott:

I would have to disagree with Jo. This morning when we started this conference series, we said that we have institutions in this country that are capable of doing the job if they know what the problems are and if they are used properly. It happens that the Federal Reserve Bank can certainly respond to some of the things that are being put on the record.

At the Federal Reserve Bank, every two weeks a vote is taken, with regard to the setting of the discount rate, which in turn affects monetary policy, and which is weighed in terms of its effect in controlling inflation versus its effect on unemployment. People who have been traditionally in the banking field know all about the ravages of inflation. But the question of the ravages of unemployment, which was very clearly laid out by the panel and also by Jo Holley, must be understood also and I would much

prefer that people like Jo stand up and say what is happening so that it goes on the record. The record will be published. It will go the Board of Governors, and that is one way that you can start to utilize the Federal Reserve Bank to try at least to alert the Nation. The cost of crime must be taken into consideration in the formulation of economic policy.