

Reverse Priorities, Says Crime Expert

By Bob Lothian

Confronting crime by building more prisons and jails is like mopping around an overflowing bathtub, according to criminologist Elliot Currie.

"Without doing something to turn off the faucet, you're going to have to keep mopping," Currie said.

Currie, author of *Confronting Crime: An American Challenge*, and visiting scholar at the Center for the Study of Law and Society at the University of California at Berkeley, addressed an audience of 100 at the Portland Building Friday. He was joined by Ron Herndon, co-chair of the Black United Front.

Countering the traditional jail and sentencing approach, Currie outlined a progressive crime-fighting agenda: more police on the beat, intensively-supervised probation, arresting wife beaters, parenting classes, early childhood education, and model community programs to rebuild neighborhoods.

"We, as progressives," he said, need to come up with "specific, cost effective ideas."

Part of the jail space problem could be solved, for example, he said, by keeping people out of jail who don't need to be there. In California, 30%-35% of the jail population is made up of mentally disabled people, the homeless, and problem drinkers, according to Currie.

"These people need to have something happen to them, but it doesn't need to happen in jail," he said.

Criminal justice priorities need to be reversed — put more police out on foot in neighborhoods instead of pouring money into sentencing and jails, Currie said. Having a cop on the beat makes residents feel that they are reclaiming their neighborhoods from "the pimps and drug pushers," he said.

Also, Currie said, the police could spend more time on the street if they didn't have so much paperwork. The paperwork is often simple and could be done by high school students, creating jobs in the process, he said.

Probation is another area where the system breaks down because officers are overworked. Currie called for smaller caseloads for probation officers who would work intensively with former prison inmates to make sure they get the jobs, medical help and psychological treatment they need in order to lead useful lives.

A comprehensive approach to crime, according to Currie, must reach outside the criminal justice system and into the home. Parents need classes to learn how to avoid passing on negative traits to their children, he said, and early childhood education programs like Head Start need continued support.

"If you put \$3000 into early childhood education, then according to one study I read, it pays off seven to one," in keeping kids out of crime and off social welfare programs, he said.

Herndon, director of a Head Start program, said Head Start prepares young children for success in school and helps steer them away from a life on the streets. "Thirteen years after they've had the experience, they still do better than those who haven't," Herndon said.

PRO Offers Tax Services to Public

by Jerry Garner

This country's tax system is confusing to many. At one time or another, almost every taxpayer runs into a seemingly intractable problem with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS).

Problems such as overdue refunds, lost tax returns or unfair treatment by an IRS agent are bound to occur, especially when one considers that last year the IRS processed roughly 105 million tax returns.

To deal with these problems, the IRS has appointed Problem Resolution Officers (PRO). These dedicated public servants help individuals who are having problems with their taxes.

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PRO handles only administrative problems; they can't change a person's tax liability or interpret the nation's tax law. A PRO officer will handle your case until it has been resolved.

CLASS REUNION

The Cleveland High School Class of 1981 will hold its five-year reunion on Saturday, August 23 at Westmoreland Park, Area B, from noon until 6 p.m. For further information, class members should write to P.O. Box 02573, Portland, Oregon, 97202.

Currie described a model program in Washington, D.C. where an integrated approach to crime-fighting and community building is having a "ripple effect" in improving the quality of life.

The program combines street patrols, a housing weatherization and rehab project providing jobs for youth, and a teen pregnancy center. While small and unable to solve all of the city's crime problems, the program serves as a model for future programs once "the crazy priorities of our political culture" are reversed, he said.

"It costs some money to do this," Currie said about the progressive programs and ideas on his agenda. "But in every case, they pay off."



Elliot Currie answers questions during a discussion on crime while Sherri Sylvester and Ron Herndon listen.

Photo by Richard J. Brown

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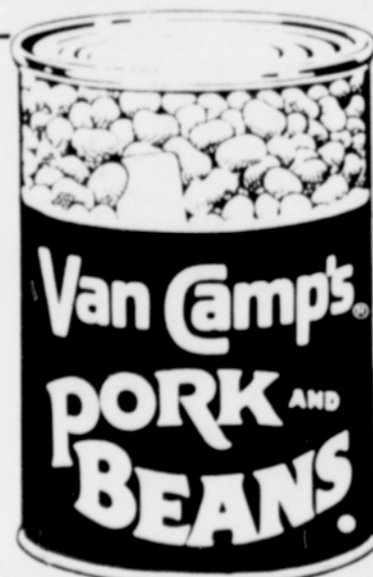


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