

part two of three part series —

What Alaska is doing about crime

(Editor's Note: The following is a speech by State Attorney General Avrum M. Gross to the Anchorage Chamber of Commerce on March 3, 1976.)

A second significant allegation was that two "known associates of a mafia chieftain have moved into businesses in Anchorage." I don't know what that's supposed to suggest, for one can search the article in vain for even an inference that these people were or are engaged in any kind of illegal activity. And, of course, the words "known associates" have a long history of use and abuse. I think we have learned over and over again that past associations can be misleading, and are proof of nothing in the present. But in this article, the juxtaposition of the item with other unproven rumors suggested that this was proof of something — something the state should do something about.

The majority of the *Times* articles talks simply about crime. And, I'm sorry to say, the reporting about that kind of crime was not particularly accurate. To start with, the statistics used by the paper to show the dramatic increase in criminal activity were not only wrong — I can't even find out where they come from. There's an allegation that prostitution is up 5,000 per cent in Fairbanks, but the actual crime statistics indicate that local arrests went from 7 in 1974 to 83 in 1975. Of course, that's a pretty good increase until you realize that in 1974, a district judge in Fairbanks ruled that prostitution statutes discriminated against women and could not be enforced, a decision that was not reversed until 1975. But that explanation went unreported by the *Times*. The rest of the crime statistics used in the article were equally misleading. The fact that the murder rate increases 50 per cent doesn't mean much if you find out that means an increase from two to three. Nor does it mean much to claim that robberies are up 160 per cent if you fail to point out that the increase means we now stand 36th out of 50 states in robberies per 100,000 people.

Prostitution and gambling were hit hard in the story. There is, of course, some gambling and prostitution going on in Alaska today. We have the largest construction project in the world, and it has brought to the state large numbers of single transient men. It is not unlike the situation that surrounds a large military base, except that discipline is much less apparent. When you have a large construction project this this, you are going to have some prostitution and some gambling, I don't care what you do to stop it. It should not be condoned, but we should not be amazed at its existence either. We have about the level of that activity here you would expect. It is not legally sanctioned, the police do enforce laws against it — enforcement which was ignored by the *Times* — and it has very little impact on most people's lives.

Another major subject of the article was pipeline theft. Originally, the article suggested losses in excess of \$200,000 per month in tools, and approximately 200 trucks missing and scattered from Miami to Mexico City. Subsequent estimates on theft ranged all the way to a Billion dollars even though Ed Patton promptly pointed out that if you stole all the pipe and all the camps, you still wouldn't have a Billion dollars. The first accurate assessment of what's missing from the pipeline has now been made, both by the state police and by Alyeska. That estimate, based on actual losses, re-orders, insurance receipts and what have you, is in the neighborhood of \$300,000 — not really too unreasonable when you consider that you're dealing with a \$7 Billion dollar project.

Perhaps what is most interesting in the recent analysis of pipeline theft is the number of items that have been recovered. Every single item of very high value reported stolen was recovered in the state, due to the work of Alyeska security people and the State Troopers, work incidentally which was ignored in the *Times* story. There have been problems in law enforcement along the pipeline — problems of coordination between Alyeska and the state and problems of fashioning a reasonable security system. But real progress is being made in that area, and it should be recognized.

The inference raised by the *Times* series was of course compounded by the fact that Alaska at the time was considering a grant from LEAA for a white collar crime task force. LEAA sent one of its minor functionaries (who no longer works for them) to Alaska to help us with the grant, and he suggested that the grant also cover organized crime. In our tentative discussions, we considered expanding the grant to cover that subject.

The LEAA man stayed in Juneau for a matter of days, sat in on a few bull sessions at Public Safety and the Baranof, and then went home to compose a memo that he thought would help us, were we to apply for the grant. His memo, which was just a few pages in length, followed the format that was subsequently used by the *Times* — link together increased criminal activity with rumors of organized crime and suggest increased organized crime. Not one single fact supported the allegations of organized crime. LEAA was thoroughly embarrassed by the whole thing, and the memo was never seen again — not out of an effort to cover up crime, but out of an effort to cover up shabby work. That memo is now used the *L.A. Times* as support for its allegations, in spite of the fact that no one, including to my knowledge, no one in LEAA itself, puts any credence on the memo at all.

At this stage I admit that we in the state administration began to be swept along by events. I for one, while being unpersuaded by the *Times* series, did not have enough facts to flatly state there was no organized crime in Alaska. Even without facts, though, we had vast opportunities before us. On the basis of the *Times* story, other papers in Seattle and elsewhere began calling on the federal government to grant us funds to deal with this most serious of problems.

CONCLUSION NEXT WEEK

There's
no
Magic



March of Dimes

To protect the unborn
and the newborn

THIS SPACE CONTRIBUTED BY THE PUBLISHER



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of this Holiday Season
remain with you
throughout the coming New Year**

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