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6638 – Riots in Cities

Guest: Rep. William C. Cramer (R-FL)

Morphew: Introduction...you have recently introduced legislation dealing with the riot situation in the United States, we've had a series of destructive riots throughout the country...what exactly did you intend to do in this legislation?

Cramer: Well, my legislation obviously is intended to require the federal government to accept its proper responsibility of preventing people, professional agitators, from traveling between states and using interstate commerce facilities for the purpose of agitating riots. Our country is a peace loving country. Domestic tranquility's one of the treasures of living in America and no one and no group has a right to use force and violence to subvert other people's rights and that's precisely what some of these professional agitators are doing and my bill would make it a crime subject to a penalty of \$10,000 or 2 years in jail or both.

Morphew: You offered this proposal as an amendment to the 1966 CRA and it won House acceptance by a big margin, 389 to 25 as I recall

Cramer: That's right. I felt it was essential, that we tried to bring some common sense to this problem, we tried to put a damper on it. I don't think the federal government can turn its head and imagine that this thing doesn't exist. It does exist in many cities and places throughout the nation. It is becoming more prevalent and it's time to put an end to rioting, to looting, to bombing, to killings, to maiming in this country and I felt this amendment would help accomplish that.

Morphew: So this would put the federal government in the same position to prosecute these traveling agitators that it is now in in regards to kidnappers?

Cramer: Kidnappers, organized crime, organized gangsterism. I introduced those bills back in '61, they're now law. This equally requires the attention of Congress, the focus of attention by the FBI, and it is a problem that can't be resolved solely on the local level because you can't prosecute someone locally if he picks up a phone or gets on a radio or television broadcast and sends it in, crosses state border. You can't prosecute him unless he's actually there in the area and there's a lot of reluctance to even do that.

Morphew: Haven't there been some instances where state or local political officials have been reluctant to prosecute even in the face of blatant violations?

Cramer: Well, I think it's quite obvious that at least up to the Atlanta situation where Carmichael was finally put in jail, if anybody teaches and preaches the doctrine of, apparently's coming out of Havana, Cuba, or of that nature, it's Mr. Carmichael. They finally put him in jail, but up to that time there seemed to be a great deal of reluctance in many areas because of the political implications to put persons in jail or to stop rioting even when they knew who was the cause.

Morphew: What kind of reaction have you had from people outside of the South?

Cramer: Well Dick, it's been a rather interesting revelation to me because of course people in Chicago and Detroit and California, many places throughout the nation, that have never quite felt the full thrust of the problem, have now an awareness of what it means to permit rabble rousers to come into a community, to stir it up on the so called civil rights issue, and therefore, it's been amazing to me as was the vote that the vast majority of the members of Congress, be they liberal, conservative, northerners, southerners, westerners, easterners, all to a large extent support the concept that America is not the place to permit anarchy to run rampant, and that's practically what it is. It'll eventually result in that if we let people violate the laws with impunity.

Morphew: For about the past 10 years a lot of southerners have called this to the attention of the public but it's met with a lukewarm reaction

Cramer: That's what the basic problem has been. When the problem in the South was in existence for school segregation and desegregation and so forth, the idea that the people complaining were in effect racists, therefore, don't pay any attention to 'em. Now no one can suggest that the mayor of Chicago is a racist (laughing). And yet they are now of necessity having to clamp down as have the southerners for a number of years to preserve what every citizen has a right to and that's domestic tranquility and freedom from the violation of their persons and their property.

Morphew: I know there's been a great deal of favorable editorial reaction from all over the country...has that been your observation?

Cramer: Yes, I've been very gratified that so many of what might be termed the liberal press has suggested that the time has come for Congress to let it be known in no uncertain terms that the federal government and the FBI is not going to stand idly by and see stores

looted, robbed, and people killed and maimed on the streets of America. We're fighting a battle in South Vietnam, in the jungles of South Vietnam and we should fight the battle against these people who are rioting and looting and maiming and killing, the battle that's being fought in the asphalt jungles of this country.

Morphew: Do you think northerners are finally waking up to the fact that they are facing an organized attempt at revolution and nothing less?

Cramer: Well, I think it's becoming a little more apparent that there are certain leaders, sometimes they get out of hand, and of course there is the right in the First Amendments (sic) to free speech, to assembly, and to petition your government, and I'd be the last to suggest that be he a Negro or anyone else should be denied that right. That's why my amendment was drafted very carefully, to make certain that it didn't infringe upon those rights but it's, no doubt in my mind that men like Carmichael have an intent and a purpose of disrupting our government. As a matter of fact, he's one that has been quoted as saying, 'the western civilization must go.' He's totally unhappy with everything, practically, in America and he wants to see it decimated by force and violence if necessary. It's been further proven that the titular head of the RAM organization, made up of Negroes, is none other than Robert Williams, who's a fugitive felon for a kidnapping charge in North Carolina, now residing and fully subscribing to the doctrine of Fidel Castro, who is in fact, that his Robert Williams, broadcasting to this country constantly, calling for these riots and calling for violence and calling for arming and calling for guerilla tactics. And that organization is in fact training people in guerilla tactics, it's common knowledge.

Morphew: And Williams on his Radio Free Dixie has even gone so far as to give detailed instructions on how to make a Molotov cocktail

Cramer: Oh yes. And the pamphlet by Raoul Castro on guerilla warfare is being distributed in this country by some of those people knowingly and intentionally with the purpose of arming these people. this is an armed, black power drive and it's organized and it's intentional and the people of America are awakened, I think finally, to the fact that this threat does exist.

Morphew: In some areas outside of the big cities, however, there has been no direct confrontation with the black power movement...do you believe people in the rural areas are fully aware to the danger?

Cramer: Some of the advocates, and I'm speaking of Carmichael in particular, in getting on nationwide television as he did a week or so ago, and saying what his intention is, that he thinks any Negro has a right to organize and to use force and violence to get his rights. I have a couple of other choice quotes that you may be interested in. Carmichael has been quoted as saying, 'they must become our brothers so we can't fight in Vietnam if we wanted to because our brothers are trying to get rid of the man and it's our job to help them bring the man to his knees,' meaning the white man. He's complaining that, story out of Cleveland, that they're no longer, in some instances, putting glass in the windows,

they're putting brick in the windows to keep them from being knocked out in these riots. And what is his answer to that? "They're building stores in Cleveland with no windows," he told a Harlem audience, "I don't know what they think they'll accomplish. It just means we have to move from Molotov cocktails to dynamite." Now, in my memory, I just don't know of anyone in this country who's been permitted to go around espousing anarchy to that extent without some penalty of the law being invoked.

Morphew: And you think there is a necessity beyond state laws for some federal legislation to deal with interstate violations along this line

Cramer: Yes, and my bill is very carefully drafted. It follows the precedent that Congress enacted overwhelming, 1962, as I previously stated, in the anti-gangster statutes. It's precisely the same approach, the Fugitive Felon Act, traveling interstate commerce for the purpose of committing any of these acts, gangster activities, shipping wagering paraphernalia in interstate commerce and so forth. So this is patterned after that specifically. And it could be no greater crime, so far as I'm concerned against an individual than for a peaceful person to be walking the street and to be shot down or to be knocked down or to be a storeowner and have your store looted and a field day made out of your personal possessions on the part of complete strangers and it's got to be brought to an end.

Morphew: Because perhaps the most basic civil right of all is the right of a peaceful citizen to walk the streets of his city in safety

Cramer: Yes and unfortunately, not only with this problem but with the extent of the crime in this country in many of the areas and in effect being encouraged by the lack of adequate law enforcement it's all tied in together, that it's time the federal government, in the instances where it can, does something about it. And where it doesn't have the authority, we give the government that authority.