

State of California ~ Department of Justice
OFFICE of the ATTORNEY GENERAL
KAMALA D. HARRIS

Attorney General Kamala D. Harris Inaugural Remarks

First, I simply want to say thank you. Thank you, all! I am deeply humbled by the trust you have placed in me and I will never forget that it is you, the People of California, whom I serve.

I've been asked many times over the last month, *What does your election mean?* Here's what I think it means: It means every Californian matters. No matter who you are or where you're from...Young, old, rich, poor, gay, straight, north, south...Whether you've lost a loved one to violence...Whether your community is being held hostage by gangs...Whether you've been shut out by mortgage fraud... or scammed by online predators...Whether your neighborhood is downstream or downwind from corporate pollution...

Today, with this oath, we affirm the principle that every Californian matters.

It's important to remember our history. This wasn't always the case. We didn't always have Lady Justice balancing the scales with her blindfold and sword in hand. In the early days of common law, there was no public prosecutor. People had to fend for themselves. Lone individuals were forced to press charges and present cases on their own, often compelled to weigh the balance of a family's livelihood against the immediate moral necessity of justice.

It goes without saying: This was an especially oppressive system for everyday working people – a system that ultimately and tragically led many victims to seek justice outside of the law.

So, I believe we should be especially proud as Americans that the office of the public prosecutor was one of the first legal innovations that emerged in the United States. To be sure, it is one of the most profound innovations in the entire history of the rule of law. And it was based on a rather revolutionary notion – that a crime against any one of us is a crime against all of us.

Many times I have looked into the eyes of a crime victim and repeated this promise. *It's not you alone versus the defendant. It's the people. The people of the State of California.*

Now I grew up with a very personal understanding of the meaning of this promise. I am particularly proud to have started my career as a prosecutor in the Alameda County DA's office – an office with a longstanding reputation as one of the best in the country.

That all began, of course, with Earl Warren, who was Alameda County's District Attorney for 14 years, and revered in the storied history of the office as a great modernizer and innovator. And through a lifetime of service – from the courtrooms of the East Bay to the California Attorney General's office to the chambers of the United States Supreme Court – Earl Warren never forgot he was a prosecutor first and, by training, that meant the law stands for everyone.

I remember: There I was...a young Alameda County Deputy DA... I was a member of the second class to integrate the Berkeley public schools. A literal daughter of Brown versus the Board of Education – now invested with the power and the responsibility of enforcing the law, and its promise of equal protection.

As a career prosecutor, Earl Warren understood: separate but equal was inherently unequal by the same logic that says, a crime against any one of us is a crime against all of us. So, ladies and gentlemen, on this day: Let us remember the house that Earl Warren built.

It's often said that a *good* prosecutor wins convictions. But a *great* prosecutor has convictions. Chief Justice Warren put it this way: "Everything I did in my life that was worthwhile, I caught hell for."

So to my fellow Californians, I say: In the coming four years, and in the continuing work of the Attorney General's office, we are going to do whatever it takes – and catch hell if necessary – in the cause of protecting and defending the lives and livelihoods of all Californians, by moving beyond the status quo.

And I will tell you something. To do that, we are going to need to get tougher– and smarter – than we have ever been. For too long, our debates have been confused and divided by the false dichotomy painting some as "tough" and others as "soft." In too many cases, we've allowed politicians to sound tough without insisting on policies that are truly tough and sound. We've accepted a fundamental misdiagnosis of the problem: Treating crime as a monolith with a one-size-fits-all solution, instead of recognizing that our approach in the overwhelming majority of non-violent offenders is failing us badly.

Being tough and smart means recognizing that we have a long-term imbalance in our criminal justice system in California, which we ignore at our own peril. When an appalling 70 percent of those released from our overburdened correctional system reappear in the revolving door within three years; when we spend twice as much on prisons as we invest in colleges and universities; and when organized violent criminal gangs continue to present an expanding threat across borders and prison walls...It is time to recognize the need for some drastic repair.

This much is obvious: With an ongoing budget crisis, we have to demand a much higher return on the enormous investment we are making. We have to be leaner and more muscular at the same time. Instead of throwing up our hands, we need to roll up our sleeves...confront weak results. Substitute best practices for old habits. And work to make California the undisputed national leader in innovation in crime fighting.

I am pleased to say that we are in the process of putting together a team of Smart on Crime working groups made up of many of the best thinkers and practitioners in California law enforcement and victims' rights. We have recruited a broad range of men and women who are experts in the innovative approaches that can make Californians safer.

And let me be clear. This is not simply a transition exercise. It is how we are going to do business for the next four years – reaching out on an ongoing basis to law enforcement and legal leaders up and down the state.

I am proud to say we've enlisted the help of Bill Bratton, who achieved a long-term decline in crime in Los Angeles by scientifically "putting cops on the dots," and Connie Rice, one of the nation's leading experts in reducing gang violence – among many, many excellent volunteers.

We are going to use these working groups to zero in on longstanding issues in key areas, from gang crime to reducing truancy to protecting our environment to combating mortgage fraud and identity theft. We'll look at two questions: What approaches are working in the field? And how can the Attorney General's Office do a better job supporting that work statewide, particularly in our smaller counties and under-served areas?

And, believe me, we are going to look at strategies that combine both the elements of enforcement and prevention. Because as Attorney General, I will tell you, I believe deeply that our core mission and obligation to the public involves fighting crimes both before and after they are committed.

And I want to be absolutely clear about where being Smart on Crime starts. Being Smart on Crime starts with being tough on violent crime.

As a 20-year courtroom prosecutor, I've tried just about every crime you can imagine. I have prosecuted sadistic criminals who have committed the most heinous, unspeakable acts against other people. I have spent hours poring over autopsy photographs. Always someone's daughter. Someone's son. Someone's child. I've prosecuted manipulative predators who commit sexual assaults on children. I have prosecuted conduct so destructive that my first and only instinct is to remove the perpetrator from free society – forever. And I have spent countless hours with victims.

So let it be clear to anyone who would menace this state with violence – to the gangs that plague our streets, to the criminals who traffic women and children, to all those who prey on the weak and the vulnerable. Justice will be swift and certain in the State of California.

As Attorney General, I am going to lead a renewed collaborative effort against gangs and organized crime. Put simply, organized criminal gangs represent the number one public safety challenge facing California, and collaborating with our federal and local law enforcement partners to fight the gang problem will be a major focus of our work.

The evidence is all around us. We are home to the nation's gang capital. Los Angeles alone has 400 separate gangs and an estimated 39,000 members. In recent years, our prisons have increasingly come under gang domination. And with a literal drug war raging in Mexico, we are witnessing an insidious growth in the influence of transnational gangs.

These gangs are as ruthless as they are toxic, committing a broad array of crimes – from drug dealing to gun violence to premeditated murder. They wreak violence and chaos wherever they operate, and they wield their power through brutal intimidation – threatening whole communities that suffer both as witness and victim to their crimes.

Transnational gangs have gained an unacceptable toehold in California, and I am looking forward to a working collaboration with the US Department of Justice and the Attorneys General of New Mexico, Arizona and Texas to build a more comprehensive and effective regional strategy.

We've asked Los Angeles Police Chief Charlie Beck, San Bernardino District Attorney Mike Ramos, and Imperial County District Attorney Gilbert Otero to help us lead a 90-day review of strategies on how we can assist local law enforcement agencies with their anti-gang initiatives and how we can better collaborate to increase our effectiveness.

One thing is clear. A more visible and strategic police presence is a direct deterrent to crime, including gang crime. I promise you: as your Attorney General, you will have a forceful advocate for public safety funding at the federal, state and local levels – particularly when it comes to putting more cops on the street.

And at every step of the way, we are going forward with an understanding that the job of the Attorney General is to help police departments do their jobs – to collaborate, to support and, above all, to serve the brave men and women in uniform who put their lives on the line for our communities every single day.

But, Californians, we know that crime is not monolithic. Ask any officer. They say that in dealing with the overwhelming number of non-violent offenders, we have to buck up and confront the evidence. In California, we have some of the severest sentencing laws in this nation, and we also have the worst record on recidivism.

For many offenders, we know prison amounts to attending “Crime College.” It’s a vicious cycle, where new inmates face extraordinary pressure to affiliate with gangs on the inside, which boils over into our communities on the outside. What the numbers say loud and clear is most non-violent offenders are learning the wrong lesson, and in many cases, they are becoming better and more hardened criminals during their prison stay.

Now – to be clear – there should be and will be strict consequences for every crime, including non-violent offenses. But to borrow a phrase from a fellow prosecutor: Perpetuating a system that recycles a majority of parolees isn’t tough on crime. It’s “tough on the taxpayers.” Californians, we must demand more. We must demand that our correctional system do less collecting and more correcting of prisoners.

Now here’s the good news: The data shows there are clear strategies that are empirically breaking the cycle. Re-entry initiatives like our Back on Track program in San Francisco have become national models, demonstrating dramatic results in reducing recidivism and related crime.

As a starting point in the Department of Justice, we are going to help lead a new focus on recidivism in our female inmate population. These inmates are generally more expensive to house and easier to reach, as more than 60 percent of them are doing time for nonviolent property and drug offenses, and two-thirds of the women in our prisons are mothers of minor children, motivated to find a way out.

Ultimately, we have to stop playing small ball and adopt a more intelligent game plan. And that means also recognizing the connection between public safety and public education, and long-term linkage between the high school dropout rate and the crime rate.

We know chronic truancy leads to dropping out, which dramatically increases the odds that a young person will become either a perpetrator or a victim of crime. Folks, it is time to get serious about the problem of chronic truancy in California. Last year we had 600,000 truant students in our elementary schools alone, which roughly matches the number of inmates in our state prisons. Is it a coincidence? Of course not.

And as unacceptable as this problem is – I know we can fix it. In San Francisco, we threatened the parents of truants with prosecution, and truancy dropped 32 percent. So, we are putting parents on notice. If you fail in your responsibility to your kids, we are going to work to make sure you face the full force and consequences of the law.

This work to combat truancy is part of the broader oath that I swore today and the oath upheld every day by the men and women of the the Attorney General’s office. Our mission statement includes a fundamental promise to “encourage economic prosperity, equal opportunity and tolerance... and to safeguard California’s human, natural, and financial resources for this and future generations.”

We are going to build aggressively on the work of former Attorney General and Governor Brown. Through the Public Rights Division, our office will remain a strong advocate in the enforcement of our environmental and consumer protection laws.

As a daughter of California, I believe a clean environment is a birthright of every Californian. I will aggressively defend AB 32, and I will fight to make sure that the people of California are not dictated to from boardrooms of big oil.

And we are going to vigorously enforce our environmental laws in all parts of California: from the Cascades to the Tehachapis, from Pelican Bay to San Diego Harbor, in Mono Lake and Clear Lake, in the Central Valley and on the Central Coast. To do that...We are going to hit the road, literally, taking the resources of our office out to smaller counties who want our help in enforcing California's environmental and consumer protection laws.

One thing is crystal clear. With over two million unemployed workers and the third worst foreclosure rate in the country, too many of our people are hurting. They need to know that they can look to this office to fight for them. For the working men and women of this state, you can count on this office to vigorously enforce our state's labor laws.

And for too many of our people the dream of home ownership has become a nightmare overnight. We will aggressively pursue any companies and individuals scamming innocent homeowners with mortgage fraud and false "rescue" services that rob Californians of their assets and their dignity.

And to the overwhelming majority of California businesses – to all those who play by the rules, pay their taxes and work in good faith to comply with the law – we are going to stand for you by going after the cheaters who put all honest, hardworking business folk at a competitive disadvantage and who would risk all of our livelihoods in a low-road race to the bottom. Greed and dishonesty should not, and will not, pay in the Golden State.

And in the spirit of Earl Warren, we are going to fight for the civil rights of every Californian – to worship as you will...to live and work where you choose...and to marry the person you love.

And in the true spirit of California, we are going to be equally vigilant and alert to the newest trends. Among my top priorities in the office is a focus on high tech crimes. With the internet fueling a widely-networked community of pedophiles, spammers and financial predators, we need to be clear. The people who break into our homes electronically will face the same consequences as those who break into our homes physically.

Californians: Ultimately, being Smart on Crime is about doing more preventing and less reacting. It is about being tough by being tough-minded, doing more of what works and less of what doesn't. It's about the rigorous application of the science of law enforcement, measuring what we do and demanding accountability for results.

Now...I owe a special thanks today to my mother Shymala Harris. My mom was the toughest, smartest and most loving person I have ever known. I know what this day meant to her. She came to Berkeley in the late 1960s as an international graduate student with a passion for science. And she had cut a deal with her parents. When her studies were complete, she was supposed to return home to India where the plan was for her to settle down into a long arranged marriage. But then she met my father, a brilliant – and handsome – young economics student. The rest, they say, is history.

But like most important history, it turned on a courageous choice. Going against traditions in her family dating back to 500 BC, my mother chose to pursue a marriage based on love, which is one of the greatest expressions of optimism that any one of us makes.

That choice made me. It made my sister Maya. And, for me, it has always summarized what it means to be Californian. Grabbing hold of your destiny, looking relentlessly forward, and having the courage to embrace change each and every day of your life.

Thank you, all. Thank you, California. Now, let's get to work.