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INTERVIEW

of

THE HONORABLE WILLIAM B. SAXBE

ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES

with

HARRY REASONER

of

ABC-TV

WASHINGTON, D. C.,

THURSDAY, APRIL 18, 1974

P R O C E E D I N G S

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2 MR. REASONER: Mr. Saxbe, you were a little  
3 reluctant to do this interview, on the grounds that it might  
4 encourage further terrorism and kidnapping. Is this kind of  
5 thing a contagion?

6 ATTORNEY GENERAL SAXBE: Yes, it's a contagion, and  
7 it involves irrational people, who feel obscure, and that  
8 they can achieve some prominence. And I base this on the  
9 recent attempted hijacking in Baltimore. Mr. Byck  
10 -- an obscure, frustrated person, who thought that by hi-  
11 jacking this airplane, which resulted in three deaths and  
12 his own, that he was going to achieve some kind of prominence,  
13 You see what happens. There is a contagion.

14 MR. REASONER: It's more of a problem to deal with  
15 irrational criminals than what you might call a sensible  
16 crook, isn't it?

17 ATTORNEY GENERAL SAXBE: Well, an irrational person  
18 means just that, you can't figure what he's going to do, and  
19 you can't easily prepare to defend against it.

20 MR. REASONER: Would the Hearst kidnapping be the  
21 only so-called political kidnapping we've had yet in the  
22 country?

23 ATTORNEY GENERAL SAXBE: Oh, I think that it's the  
24 only prominent one. This follows a line that's set out by  
25 terrorist organizations worldwide, emanating from Cuba and

1 from other places, that says that this Robin Hood type of  
2 approach, where the demand that you buy groceries for the  
3 poor, something like that. It's the only one --  
4 that we've had.

5 MR. REASONER: Do you think that it -- do you think  
6 that it's the beginning of more of that kind of thing?

7 ATTORNEY GENERAL SAXBE: I don't think so. I hope  
8 not. Because there are so few people that would be capable  
9 of responding in the manner that they demanded, and certainly  
10 the government is not going to respond on this if I'm  
11 kidnapped or another prominent government official. And  
12 I think that people would realize now that you can't deal with  
13 them; no matter what you do, it's not going to make them happy.

14 MR. REASONER: American policy abroad has been to  
15 never pay ransom or give in to the demands; isn't that right?

16 ATTORNEY GENERAL SAXBE: Yes, and this is through  
17 the State Department, and I really believe that it should be  
18 domestic policy.

19 MR. REASONER: What kind of protection, if you're  
20 not going to deal with political terrorists, what kind of  
21 protection can you give the citizens?

22 ATTORNEY GENERAL SAXBE: Well, your protection is  
23 basically local. This is something that's hard to explain  
24 to people, because murder is a local crime, it is not a  
25 federal crime; and assault and robbery and most of the violent

1 crimes are local crimes.

2 You must work with your local police department,  
3 and they're competent to handle these complaints.

4 However, when kidnapping occurs, or a kidnapping  
5 plot is made apparent, then it becomes federal crime, and  
6 we can move into it. But it's basically preparation in  
7 yourself, your family, your school. The FBI has put out some  
8 instruction sheets that are available to anybody that writes  
9 in. How to protect yourself as a parent. What to tell the  
10 children. How the school can protect you. How the school  
11 can help. What to do if there is an actual kidnapping.  
12 The response.

13 You must have confidence in the law enforcement  
14 people, and certainly the first thing that the kidnapper is  
15 going to tell you is, "If you tell the FBI, we're going to  
16 kill the victim."

17 The FBI is aware of this. They are not going to  
18 disclose that you contacted them. They can work with you,  
19 and certainly the Patricia Hearst kidnapping has indicated  
20 they even go the second mile, in following your wishes in  
21 trying to recover the victim.

22 And the first importance is not capturing the  
23 kidnapper, the first importance always of the law enforcement  
24 people is the safe return of the victim. And if more people  
25 knew this, I think that they would go directly to the FBI and

1 permit us to help them.

2 MR. REASONER: Should an individual pay ransom?

3 ATTORNEY GENERAL SAXBE: No, but again there's no  
4 law that says that you cannot pay ransom. And people are  
5 desperate, and perhaps the best way to catch the kidnapper is  
6 to pay ransom, and perhaps the FBI would, if you're determined  
7 to do it, would show you the best way to do it so that they  
8 can be apprehended.

9 There's been suggestions in Congress that you make  
10 it illegal to pay ransom. But I don't believe that would be  
11 effective, because a distraught family, a father and a mother,  
12 are not going to pay much attention to a law when they think  
13 that that's the only way that they can get the kidnapped  
14 victim back.

15 MR. REASONER: What about the quixotic demands  
16 that were mentioned before, like a food distribution program;  
17 do you think they might come under some legislation? The  
18 Attorney General of California has suggested they should.

19 ATTORNEY GENERAL SAXBE: There has been a suggested  
20 law in Congress that this could not be accomplished. It's  
21 not been passed at the present time. There is a provision  
22 in law at the present time that you can do nothing in the  
23 way of aiding a kidnap and sustaining it, and this might  
24 apply.

25 But there again, a distraught parent is a pretty hard

1 person to deal with.

2 MR. REASONER: In, I think it was the Minnesota  
3 kidnapping case recently, the press came in for some  
4 criticism. Do you have criticism of the press in the way it  
5 handled, for instance, the Hearst case?

6 ATTORNEY GENERAL SAXBE: No. I think that to handle  
7 it any other way would certainly have not been more rewarding  
8 than the method.

9 And I think, too, you must recognize that Mr. Hearst,  
10 of a newspaper family, certainly is going to make open  
11 disclosure under any conditions. And I think that when you  
12 criticize the press on this, you have to question whether  
13 the people don't have a right to know what's going on.

14 But the kidnapping down in Mexico, which I disclosed  
15 some few weeks ago, I don't think that it benefitted them to  
16 keep it a secret for a week. I think that we have to make  
17 reasonable effort to keep the people informed.

18 MR. REASONER: Particularly overseas, in the case  
19 of some businessmen and diplomats, the kind of protection  
20 they have to have almost makes it impossible for them to do  
21 their job. Is this kind of protection worth it?

22 ATTORNEY GENERAL SAXBE: Well, when you talk about  
23 Argentina -- I presume -- and some other countries, there's no  
24 way that you can be entirely safe. And I think the example of  
25 paying fourteen million, allegedly, and not getting the

1 victim back, gives you a pretty good indication of what you  
2 can expect in trying to deal with kidnapers wherever they  
3 are in the world.

4 But I don't think that we can have a platoon of  
5 soldiers around every American businessman. But there's  
6 no protection that we can provide after they go into these  
7 countries, except within our State Department group or  
8 within those government employees attached to an Embassy.

9 MR. REASONER: We've become aware of a wide variety  
10 of physical devices, sophisticated alarm systems and buzzers,  
11 personal wristwatch alarms; are the gadgets any help, do you  
12 think, in preventing a kidnapping?

13 ATTORNEY GENERAL SAXBE: Our Law Enforcement  
14 Assistance Office is developing a gadget which would be very  
15 helpful in this, it would sound an alarm, that's no bigger  
16 than a wristwatch and goes on your wrist, it's kind of a  
17 Dick Tracy kind of an arrangement, but it's designed primarily  
18 for law enforcement people and not for people generally.  
19 It could be used by someone in a critical position who thought  
20 they might be criticized.

21 But terrorism extends to a great deal more than  
22 kidnapping. Terrorism extends to bombing and also to the  
23 indiscriminate shooting of people, such as we have in San  
24 Francisco. We had 1900 bombings in this country last year.

25 And this kind of terrorism, such as we see in

1 northern Ireland and in the Middle East, is really the most  
2 alarming, because it is so indiscriminate that people are  
3 killed without any concern of who they are.

4 Now, we had a -- just in the last day or two, a  
5 bomb exploded in Israel, presumably set by Arab terrorists,  
6 and yet almost all of the people killed were Arabs.

7 It's ridiculous. It's so indiscriminate. And  
8 therefore very dangerous.

9 MR. REASONER: You said 1900 last year. Was that  
10 a substantial increase? Is it substantially increasing year  
11 to year?

12 ATTORNEY GENERAL SAXBE: Somewhat, but we have  
13 fewer than we did during the Sixties when everyone was more  
14 or less involved -- not everyone, but a lot of people were  
15 involved in violence and a lot of black-powder bombs were put  
16 up in front of banks, that blew out a couple of windows, and  
17 were not the type of terrorism that we're really alarmed  
18 about.

19 MR. REASONER: Is there a possibility that we might  
20 over-react to kidnapping and other forms of terror in --  
21 first, by the restrictions we put on our own lives, or by  
22 the restrictions we put on our other citizens?

23 ATTORNEY GENERAL SAXBE: Yes, and this is a real  
24 danger, because we live in an open society, and we're  
25 extremely reluctant to change it to a closed society. You



1 can get away with -- do away with terrorism in a closed  
 2 society, where everyone is accounted for, the police are on  
 3 every corner, the communities report if they see any  
 4 suspicious activity. You don't have terrorism in China, you  
 5 don't have terrorism in Russia, except government control.  
 6 And this is something that we don't want to do in this  
 7 country.

8 We rely on our Constitution and the freedoms of the  
 9 individual. One of our great prides is we can travel around  
 10 the country without any travel permits. We can tell our  
 11 neighbors that it's none of their business what we do.

12 And to change this open society to defend against  
 13 terrorism is a pretty high price to pay.

14 San Francisco is hard up against it right now, and  
 15 some of the measures that they have taken are radical  
 16 measures -- necessary. But I don't think we want to go a  
 17 great deal further.

18 And certainly we don't want to say to people: Well,  
 19 it's unsafe to be on the streets of your city.

20 This is one of the great luxuries enjoyed by our  
 21 civilization, and -- or to say that, as in Roman times, that  
 22 for a man to walk abroad he had to have six bodyguards with  
 23 him. We can't have that.

24 MR. REASONER: You spoke of the Robin Hood syndrome  
 25 in some of the crimes, and some of the terrorists do claim

1 that they are fighting poverty and fighting injustice. Do  
2 you see any validity to what they say?

3 ATTORNEY GENERAL SAXBE: No, I don't, because the  
4 worst kind of injustice is the kind that they dish out.  
5 And we have seen that their efforts generally extend to their  
6 own group. And they are -- when once you get beyond the  
7 law, they're not very tolerant with people who disagree with  
8 them. And when they says that "We're going to defend the  
9 people, the weak and oppressed", and so on, they're going  
10 to defend them and support them in a way that they say,  
11 not under the Constitution. But what they declare to be right  
12 and wrong. And we can't buy that.

13 MR. REASONER: This Symbionese Liberation Army  
14 came as a surprise, I think, to most of the public. Would it  
15 have been better to, to some extent, open your files and tell  
16 people about this kind of organization before they get in  
17 the news?

18 ATTORNEY GENERAL SAXBE: Yes. But the Symbionese  
19 Liberation Army is -- is not a large group. If it's grown  
20 at all, it's grown from irresponsibles who have joined since  
21 the original venture. It was formed in California prisons,  
22 and is not one that we could have anticipated to have  
23 been successful, except in some dramatic thing like this.

24 These people will be apprehended.

25 We don't think that it's something that's going to

1 long survive. Most terrorist groups don't, because they're  
2 led by irresponsible people who, if they enjoy any success at  
3 all, are soon dissipated in -- while in irresponsible acts.

4 MR. REASONER: A final question. You reject the  
5 idea of changing our society. Is there anything within the  
6 framework of the society that you don't have that you wish  
7 you did have to fight terrorism?

8 ATTORNEY GENERAL SAXBE: There's only one thing,  
9 and that's something I'm determined to work on, and that's  
10 the full and enthusiastic support of the people in this  
11 country.

12 We have to have belief in our institutions and in  
13 our police. The police are the servants of the community.  
14 They are the peace-keepers. They are not policy-makers,  
15 and they only respond to the laws that are passed for them  
16 to enforce.

17 I hope the people can understand this. The police  
18 are not agents of oppression; and our courts are manned by  
19 the people who, again, serve; and the statutes that are set  
20 out are set out for the purpose of making our society  
21 livable.

22 People must not get the idea that government is an  
23 oppressor. Government is the people's government, and  
24 justice must be fair and it must be fast. We've had delays  
25 that have led some people to believe that government is not

1 responsible. We're trying to eliminate these delays.  
2 Speedy justice, and fair justice, and competent, well-trained  
3 police. These are the best safeguards we have, that we can  
4 continue to have an open society. And this needs citizen  
5 support.

6 MR. REASONER: Thank you very much, sir.

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