

STATEMENT OF REAR ADMIRAL OLIVER NAQUIN, U.S.N.  
(RETIRED), FOURTEENTH STREET, NORTHWEST

Admiral NAQUIN. Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee.

I appreciate very much the opportunity to appear before you this morning, and with your permission, I wish to speak on behalf of my wife and her sister who are co-owners of the property on the Southeast corner of 14th Street and Columbia Road, Northwest, in the District of Columbia.

The above property was vandalized, looted and burned beyond salvage during the civil riots of the 4th, 5th, and 6th of April, 1968. First, all store fronts of the five stores of the structure were smashed. Next, they were looted and finally burned by arsonists. In no one of these separate and distinct phases was any protection afforded this property by either the District of Columbia or the Federal Government. And, Mr. Chairman, this is a Federal city.

It would seem that the destruction of this property, beyond the feasibility of salvage was not enough to satisfy the arsonists. On or about 8 May, a month later, the property was again set on fire. At this time I understand the blaze was brought under control rather promptly. But again, on the evening of 10 May, the arsonists had another go at it and this time, according to the Washington Post, about 24 pieces of fire fighting equipment were required to bring the conflagration under control.

I cite the above to emphasize that not only was protection totally lacking during the initial riot period, but that more than a month later the same condition prevails. Apparently, arsonists can burn at will in the District of Columbia, even while we are meeting here this morning.

As a result of the initial burning of the above-mentioned property, the District of Columbia, Department of Licenses and Inspections, served notice on the owners that, "it has been determined that the building is imminently dangerous and unsafe." This directive was received around 3 p.m. on 11 April and by it the owners were given until noon the following day to commence securing or removing this structure. To say that such a directive was none too realistic is an understatement.

I might say parenthetically it might not have been so unrealistic in the case of a single building being destroyed in a normal accident, but here we have a wholesale situation which is different.

Mr. WHITENER. You may have problems finding the labor to do it under these conditions.

Admiral NAQUIN. That was just referred to, that it was intended to take care of unsafe structures which the property owner maintains in a routine situation, to protect the lives of the community and not in a serious set of circumstances as we have had here. I think the District Government should have been interested in buildings not building soundly. So, I would assume that the wrecking people were heavily involved at the time and that it would be, as you say, totally unrealistic to expect to get someone to do this thing.

I called the Department of Licenses and Inspections as soon as we received this notice, and I was told that the emphasis here was really