

I am enclosing a copy of our open letter to the President of the United States, the Mayor and Officials of the District of Columbia, and the Congress of the United States.

Very truly yours,

J. GRIFFIN ROUNTREE,
Executive Director.

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES; THE MAYOR AND OFFICIALS OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA; AND THE CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES

All citizens of the United States have a right to visit their national capital, and this right should be denied to none. All citizens have a concomitant right to do so with reasonable assurance of personal safety. This dream of every American from childhood, this privileged pilgrimage to the shrine of liberty, is now denied to the vast majority of the people by the actions of a few. The majority of the people are afraid to visit Washington, and many of its own citizens are leaving the city. The effect on business, property values, and tax income cannot escape even the casual observer, nor can our need for support by the people's representatives.

The economic advancement, or even survival, of the entire community of Washington depends largely on the existence and growth of commerce within the city. If all commerce ceased, the community would cease. The daily needs of the people, rich and poor alike, for food, clothing, shelter, transportation, services, health, recreation, and many other aspects of life are provided by the business community. In many areas of this metropolis the innocent citizens are now denied convenient access to these requirements because businesses have been destroyed or driven out by arson, looting, and ever increasing harassment, violence, and open crime.

These same businesses provide the opportunity for tens of thousands to support themselves and their families, but many are now denied the means of livelihood by the destruction or dispersal of the businesses for which they had worked. Why do the many innocent have to continue to suffer while the guilty run rampant through the streets.

The taxes of the business community provide a large part of the support of the social welfare, police, fire, and other public functions of this city. Taxes have been increasing, and are expected to increase more, but protection has been decreasing, and if the recent past is any indication, it is expected to decrease more.

As businessmen and as private citizens we want to live within the law, but we want others also to live within the law. We want the protection and justice of the law for all. We want to respect the rights of others, but we want them to respect our rights.

Men have given into the hands of society their own defense and the defense of their families in order to attain order and the general welfare through law. Not fear or intimidation, but love of civilization has been the genesis of the self-control and the reluctance to react with force against force on the part of threatened communities during recent disorders. There may well be a dangerous misunderstanding of this point on the part of a militant few. If people are pressed too far, or if their families, communities, or means of livelihood are threatened beyond endurance or beyond the ability or willingness of society to provide adequate protection, they will retake into their own hands their inalienable right to self-defense and survival.

This nation has borne the allegedly spontaneous rape of its cities with restraint and patience beyond ordinary understanding, but the eyes of the whole country are now on Washington, and with a clear understanding that the approaching events will not be spontaneous. An aura of uncertainty and personal insecurity, a growing smog of fear, hangs over this, the national capital. It is not just another city. It belongs to all Americans, and all Americans are watching. Continued order and justice under a common law depends on the outcome. If the Government is incapable of assuring the security of the capital and the personal protection of less than a million citizens, you may fully expect that the lesson will not be lost on two hundred million.

Our national policy has been to assure national security wherever possible through the existence of sufficient force to be an overwhelming deterrent to aggression rather than through the use of that force to punish aggression. Will the Government of the District of Columbia and the nation provide an overwhelming deterrent to violence? Will they provide visible police and troops sufficient to discourage the criminal few from acts which, unfortunately and unjustly, are