

**CLEVELAND MAYOR RALPH J. PERK:  
STRONG LEADERSHIP  
DURING TROUBLED TIMES**

**CHAPTER 4: MAYOR PERK FIGHTS CRIME**

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## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **MAYOR PERK FIGHTS CRIME**

A highly energetic leader, Ralph Perk was up and running within days of his election as mayor. One of his first acts as mayor involved traveling to Washington to meet with Vice-President Spiro T. Agnew. Their candid discussions focused primarily on the City of Cleveland's current economic plight. Being one of a select group of big city Republican mayors gave Perk a decided edge with both the Nixon and Ford administrations. A shrewd politician with close connections to the White House, the mayor enjoyed phenomenal success when it came to landing large grants for important programs. The Impact Cities Crime Fighting Program, the Comprehensive Employment and Training Program (CETA) and the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority (RTA) were three highly successful federally-supported initiatives to gain national recognition. They demonstrated Mayor Perk's political mastery at its best.

The Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA) approved the Impact Cities Crime Fighting Program in June 1972. (1) Under Title I of the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968, Congress authorized LEAA to provide large crime-ridden cities such as Cleveland with significant federal grants. (2) These funds helped to reduce robbery, burglaries and stranger-to-stranger street crime by significantly improving local law enforcement capabilities. Under this special agreement, qualifying communities in the U.S. determined their worst crime related problems and then developed special crime-fighting programs to eliminate them. LEAA also required participating cities to recruit top-notch law

enforcement personnel to operate these programs. Federal officials further insisted that these municipalities furnish the public with valuable information on crime prevention. Congressional leaders earmarked additional funds to build new police stations, organize auxiliary police forces and train community service officers to assist their local police departments.

Officials in the LEAA considered the City of Cleveland to be a prime candidate for its latest funding cycle. After all, 17% of all crimes committed in the State of Ohio occurred there. In addition, over half of the city's population was under the age of 25 and that group accounted for 80% of the arrests. The fact that the bulk of the city's criminal activity occurred within predominately African American neighborhoods lent further credence to their argument. Finally, a dramatic increase in the number of drug related crimes appeared to insure federal money.

Shortly after the mayoral elections, Ralph Perk and one of his closest advisors Robert Bennett met with U.S. Attorney General John Mitchell. Much of their conversation focused on allegations of graft and corruption within the Cleveland Police Department. Mitchell claimed that the force had the dubious reputation of being one of the worst law enforcement agencies in the entire country. He made it quite clear that this must end. The Attorney General also informed Mayor Perk that a new federal crime prevention program was about to be announced and that in all probability the City of Cleveland would qualify for it.

On January 13, 1972, LEAA unveiled its \$160m crime prevention program. Mayor Perk responded by hiring Richard Boylan to coordinate his proposed Impact

Cities Crime Fighting Program. (3) An Ohio State University law graduate and former Ohio Assistant Attorney General, Boylan worked for the U.S. Justice Department.

His first task as program coordinator involved developing a comprehensive law enforcement proposal for LEAA. Called Cleveland Will Survive and Thrive Impact Program Master Plan 1972, this \$20m two-year initiative received support from most anti-crime agencies in Ohio. (4) Focusing primarily on robbery, burglary and one-on-one street assaults, this proposal challenged the local justice system to reduce the local crime rate by 5% in two years and 20% in five years. It also called for overhauling the city's police force. Boylan's inclusion of the Performance Management System (PMS) guaranteed an accurate measurement of program effectiveness and insured an efficient assessment of priorities based on resources. (5)

When LEAA officials announced the final eight recipients Cleveland was not on that list. Atlanta, Baltimore, Dallas, Denver, Miami, Newark, Portland and St. Louis had made the cut. An outraged Mayor Perk flew to Washington and demanded that the White House intervene on Cleveland's behalf. White House officials met with LEAA officials and Cleveland was added to the list. It replaced Miami. (6)

LEAA Director Jerris W. Leonard announced that Cleveland would be receiving four grants of more than \$21m. Mayor Perk appointed Richard Boylan to serve as program director in July 1972. (7) LEAA approved three additional grants worth \$1.4m the following month. Much of that initial funding went towards establishing a crime prevention patrol. (8) The felony investigation squad, citizen's

auxiliary police force, police narcotics unit and drug abuse center also benefited. Those grants also covered the cost of adding double-shift workloads for municipal court bailiffs and judges. Under this new arrangement, the local court system added six new judges from nearby counties. This increase in the daily workload shortened the time between a suspect's apprehension, trial and sentencing. Federal funding also upgraded common pleas court and the adult parole program. The police athletic league, inner-city youth academy, mental health facilities and senior citizen programs profited as well. City officials used some of these funds to expand vocational education opportunities and install new computers into police cars.

These federal grants significantly reduced crime. Reported crime in Cleveland for 1972 was down 19% from 1971. That included a 38% decrease in auto thefts and a 22% drop in rape cases. Burglaries and robberies also were down by 16% and 14% respectively. LEAA responded to this positive news by allocating three more grants totaling \$11m. Boylan used the bulk of these funds to expand the city's juvenile delinquency prevention program and pay overtime salaries of officers assigned to the outreach centers. The remaining funds went towards hiring additional police officers.

Envisioning an even greater role for Boylan and his program, the mayor announced on March 13, 1973 the establishment of the Impact Cities Task Force. Nicknamed the Smut Squad, it targeted inner-city bookstores that sold explicit sexually oriented subject materials to minors. This highly publicized campaign received the support of many religious leaders. Unfortunately, enthusiasm soon waned as other more pressing issues took center stage. Shifting priorities led

**Richard Boylan to change his program focus. He decided to revamp the Cleveland Police Department rather than leading the charge against pornography. Whether Ralph Perk fully agreed with Boylan's decision is hard to determine. Publicly, the mayor wholeheartedly supported the crusade against pornography. However, behind the scenes Perk encouraged Boylan to follow his own instincts. The mayor wanted this young man to stay in Cleveland. He thought that Richard Boylan would make a great future mayor.**

**In terms of his own political prospects, Mayor Perk knew that his re-election in November 1973 would not depend on eliminating pornography. It would be determined by how well he handled a whole range of issues and whether the voting public still had faith in his leadership abilities. Perk remained confident that he could ride out nearly any political storm that might arise. After all, his crusade against pornography had closed some of the city's most notorious porno shops and peep shows. Why belabor this point any further. Mayor Perk was absolutely right. He handily won re-election that fall with a two to one margin over his opponent the Clerk of Cleveland City Council Mrs. Mercedes Cotner. (9)**

**City officials in January 1974 announced a 13% drop in the city's homicide rate from the previous year. The number of reported rape cases had decreased by 10% while robbery had dropped by 17%. Assault and battery had also decreased by 18% and burglaries were down by 12%. The local press congratulated the mayor on his tough stance against crime. This was not the first time that Ralph Perk had received accolades for his crime fighting efforts. The press had**

**congratulated him in September 1973 when the city received \$4.5m in federal grants to fight school truancy and juvenile delinquency.**

**Federal officials approved an additional grant of \$812,070 in late January 1974. (10) These funds went towards launching the Impact Neighborhood Patrol. Made up of the Impact Cities Task Force, the Impact Cities Task's Force Tactical Unit and sixty police officers, this group assisted the Auxiliary Police during the peak crime months of October, November and December. Washington also authorized \$1.6m to train 600 additional auxiliary officers. (11)**

**In March 1974, Mayor Perk announced that the city had received a special \$100,000 federal grant to create the Cleveland Crime Commission (CCC). The press called it the God Squad. Led by Msgr. Robert Blair, Rabbi Rudolph Rosenthal, Bishop Joseph Feghali and Reverend Joan Campbell, CCC investigated allegations of graft and corruption within the city's police force. It also recommended administrative and procedural changes for that department.**

**With the legal assistance of Charles F. Clarke, a prominent litigation lawyer from the Cleveland-based law firm of Squire, Sanders, and Dempsey, CCC discovered that allegations of graft and corruption within the police force were mostly unfounded. However, that did not mean that the police department was not in need of major reform. It required an extensive overhaul. Commissioners recommended modernizing administrative procedures and job recruiting methods. They also called for establishing a probationary period for all police recruits, providing more extensive cadet training and furnishing crime prevention programs for children. Commissioners further suggested that the police department expand**

its speaker's bureau and offer special awards and merit pay for those officers who displayed exceptional heroism in the line of duty.

Other recommendations included greater administrative assistance from city hall, elimination of job discrimination and a total overhaul of operations at the Warrensville Workhouse. These commissioners also called for replacing the present Public Safety Director with a new Police Director. This new mayoral appointee would not only oversee all aspects of law enforcement within the police department itself; but also, serve as its spokesperson.

The Cleveland Crime Commission submitted its final report to city hall in May 1974. (12) Mayor Perk praised the commissioners for their dedicated service and hard work. (13) However, the public was not as enthusiastic. Critics argued that it would be nearly next to impossible to implement most of their recommendations, far too political. A June 5, 1974 editorial in the Cleveland Plain Dealer summed it up by saying that the majority of these suggestions were little more than "warmed-over proposals of previous committees, some dating back to 1914." The editorial staff concluded that the commission had glossed over many other equally important issues. (14) Persistent criticism forced Cleveland Police Chief Lloyd Garey to disband the group in the fall of 1975. (15)

Mayor Perk announced on June 30, 1973 that the Impact Cities Crime Fighting Program had received an additional \$100,000 federal grant. (16) Director Boylan used those funds to operate six escort teams for senior citizens living in public housing estates. Recruited through the Urban League of Greater Cleveland, these teams made up of local teenagers escorted the elderly from their apartments to



neighborhood clubs, stores, restaurants and doctor offices weekdays. Public reaction to this program was favorable.

In 1974, Cleveland's Finance Director Vincent Campanella authorized Richard Boylan and the city's Safety Director James Carney to establish the nation's first Emergency Medical Service Bureau (EMS). A recent study released by the Metropolitan Health Planning Corporation (MHPC) indicated an alarming increase in the number of emergency medical calls over the past two years. MHPC recommended that immediate action be taken by the city to remedy this growing problem. (17) Boylan and Carney responded quickly. They established an efficiently run countywide emergency phone system and a first rate training program for EMS workers. The two directors also purchased ambulances and medical equipment. Beginning operations in October 1975, EMS handled over 80,000 calls in its first year.

Mayor Perk announced the appointment of Richard Boylan as the Interim Director of the Warrensville Workhouse on August 16, 1974. His first task as workhouse director involved firing corrupt employees and prison guards. He also secured a \$5m grant from Cuyahoga County to renovate the sixty-year old facility. Boylan also supported efforts by the Perk Administration to construct a new \$9.2m mental retardation center on a nearby site. The city completed that project in 1975.

Richard Boylan resigned as Interim Director in January 1975 to return to his full-time duties as Director of the Impact Cities Crime Fighting Program. Less than a month later, the mayor appointed him the city's new law enforcement advisor. However, strong opposition from Cleveland Councilman Dennis Kucinich and Ohio

**Representative Edward Feighan forced his resignation. Boylan continued to serve as Director of the Impact Cities Crime Fighting Program returning to his private law practice later in 1975.**

**Impact Cities ended that same year. A nationally recognized program with a successful track record it had reduced crime in Cleveland. (18) Critics at that time argued that its narrow focus and lack of direct public input served to undermine its effectiveness. (19) In retrospect, this criticism seems harsh. Highly focused programs like this one require expert leadership. Leaders with law enforcement and legal backgrounds have the professional know how necessary to operate them successfully. Placing less qualified persons in key leadership roles would only spell disaster.**

**The Impact Cities Crime Fighting Program produced many positive results. Nowhere was this more evident than in the Cleveland Police Department. Changes in that department ranged from expanding the police force's capacities and revamping its out-of-date operational procedures to introducing modern crime solving techniques and expanding career opportunities for veteran officers. Additional reforms introduced included higher salaries for patrol officers and special job incentives for career officers. None of these advances would have occurred without the diligent efforts of both Richard Boylan and Mayor Perk. They made the city a much safer place to live and work in.**

**Mayor Perk did not limit his reform activities to crime and public safety issues alone. Recognizing the growing hardships facing many Clevelanders, Perk focused much of his attention towards helping those with the greatest economic and**

**social needs. The federally-sponsored CETA program represented one of the new initiatives he enthusiastically supported. It offered hope and promise to thousands of Clevelanders during the turbulent 1970s.**

## ENDNOTES

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5. U.S. Dept. of Justice, Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, Cleveland Impact Cities Program, A Plan Against Crime. Sect.3, Impact Program Structure: 3-1 to 3-12. Richard Boylan, “Cleveland Will Survive and Thrive,” Impact Program Master Plan Summary, 1972.
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15. Mayor Perk believed in the CCC mission see Harry Stainer, "Perk Prepares to Mobilize Smut Fighters," The Cleveland Plain Dealer, June 11, 1977.
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