



Today is the Day!

TFF Sample Speech

(approximately 1000 words, 7 minutes)

“Today’s Texas Justice: Smart, Fair, and Effective”

Texans are tough. We always have been, and that’s a point of pride. And we’re tough on crime—make no mistake about it. Today, however, that’s not enough. Today, our criminal justice system is too expensive, clogged up with the wrong people, and not keeping us as safe as it could be. It’s time that we got *smart* on crime as well as tough.

Our criminal justice system is supposed to keep us safe, but it could be doing a much better job: some of our laws are actually turning minor criminals into career felons, and that’s not smart. Some of our laws are putting seventeen year-old kids who got busted with pot in adult jails and prisons with serious offenders, and that’s not smart. And some of our laws are letting dangerous criminals walk out of jail just because they post bond, while keeping honest folks locked up just because they’re poor—that’s not smart, fair, or effective.

First off, let’s look at the seventeen year-olds. They’re still kids—the science says so, our school system says so, and almost every state in the nation says so. But in Texas, seventeen year-olds who commit crimes get treated just like adults. That doesn’t make sense—if a kid isn’t old enough to buy a pack of cigarettes, how can we throw him into an adult jail, try him in an adult court, and maybe even sentence him to an adult prison for stealing that pack of cigarettes?

Or look at our county jails: we’re paying about \$2 million *every single day* to keep people locked up who haven’t even been found guilty of anything. Now, some of them are a danger to their communities, and some of them are a flight risk, but most of them are hard-working men and women who just want to get back to their jobs and their families, but they can’t because they don’t have the money to post bond. And some who are a legitimate danger to their communities are walking free just because they *do* have the money.

And we have people getting felony convictions and doing felony time for very minor drug possession. We’re not talking about cartel leaders or drug runners, or people selling drugs to kids. We’re talking about Oxycodone without a prescription, and suddenly the state is spending \$36,000 to keep this guy locked up for two years, when what he needs is 30 days in rehab—at a fraction of the price.

And we have people who have done their time, paid their debts, learned their lesson, but they can’t even get a company to look at their job application. And they can’t get a license as a plumber or an electrician, and everywhere they go, doors are shutting in their face. Someone without a job is *three times* more likely to re-offend than someone who’s got the chance to get up every morning and go to work. Now, you tell me—does that sound smart?

Of course not. And that's why today is the day for smart, fair, effective criminal justice in Texas. Today's Texas Justice consists of four basic steps to address each of these problems in ways that will save money and protect our communities.

First, we've got to raise the age of the adult system from seventeen to eighteen. Seventeen year-olds can't buy a car or get married without their parents' permission, but Texas criminal law acts as if they're adults. Further, federal law requires a host of measures to keep seventeen year-olds safe in adult prisons and jails, and the cost is astronomical—that's one reason the Texas Sheriffs' Association supports raising the age.

Next, we've got to get realistic with low-level drug offenders. Jail and prison are for dangerous criminals—not someone who got caught smoking a little weed. But a single joint can get you six months in Texas, and someone else's prescription can get you two years. Besides the terrible effects that can have on someone's life, it's just plain expensive—millions and millions of dollars every year. If someone's got a drug problem, they need help, and we can still make sure that happens. But that's not going to happen in jail.

Today's Texas Justice also eliminates the for-profit money bond system that's a “get out of jail free” card for people who can afford it (and a “lose your job and your house” card for people who can't) and replaces it with three options: a simple citation, like a traffic ticket, for the lowest-level offenses; supervised release—including tracking devices, if necessary—for people who don't pose a danger to their communities; and finally, keeping the people who are a genuine risk of flight or crime locked up, no matter how much money they have for bail.

Finally, for those who have successfully served their time, Today's Texas Justice makes it easier for them to live honest, productive lives, take care of their kids, and contribute to society. It doesn't make sense for employers to automatically refuse job applications from anyone with a felony conviction. Employers are still free to hire or not hire whoever they want, but now they'll have all the facts before they decide. And State Agencies can still refuse to grant a license based on a felony conviction, but now they'll have to show good cause. If someone has a ten-year old felony conviction for harvesting oysters at night, there's no reason they can't be a plumber today.

Texans have a choice: we can keep doing what we've been doing, even though we know it's costing us money, even though we know it's driving people into criminal lifestyles, even though we know it's not fair, and even though we know it's not keeping us as safe as it could be. Or we can make common-sense criminal justice reforms that will save money and protect our communities. Call your state senator. Go visit your state representative. Tell your friends and neighbors, talk it out with your family members. It's time to pass Today's Texas Justice. It's smart, fair and effective, and today is the day!