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Tougher Law Enforcement Needed

A newspaper photographer snapped a picture of a sign posted at the Oklahoma City Mass-trans bus barn. It warned drivers: "You are about to enter the city's most dangerous area ... the public streets."

No doubt, the intended connotation referred to traffic, but it might have related to the crime situation also. Citizens no longer are safe on the streets, or in their places of business or their homes.

Our law enforcement system has become grossly inadequate for dealing with criminals and protecting citizens from everyday hazards of bodily violence, burglary and robbery.

Homes that are burglarized may get little more attention than a routine police report, because such crimes are rarely solved. A so-called "convenience store" really qualified for its name recently when it was hit twice in one day by robbers.

Neighborhood druggists have begun carrying pistols to protect

themselves from hoodlums demanding drugs as well as money. Gypsies have swarmed into places of business in Oklahoma city and elsewhere to terrorize owners and steal anything that could be carried away.

It might not make a lot of difference whether arrests are made. If apprehended, outlaws would be boarded at state expense, and given costly trials, frequently with defense lawyers paid by taxpayers. If convicted, outlaws, may be sent to prison for brief periods of "rest and recreation."

Federal courts have interpreted laws to favor the outlaws, requiring motel-like facilities. Criminals now seem to gain "rights," rather than lose them. State lawmakers are considering laws to speed up the present "revolving door" parole system.

Sheriffs and police officials have criticized the system that frequently allows criminals they arrest to be back on the streets in a matter of weeks. Many never go to prison, even if convicted, because of legal technicalities, suspended sentences

and lengthy appeal processes.

Some felons convicted of sensational crimes have been able to convert their outlawry into a source of income by peddling their "true confessions." Because of the failure of tax-paid law enforcement systems to protect citizens, numerous business and citizen groups are employing "private security" in hopes of shielding their lives and properties.

The cost, estimated at \$12 billion a year nationally, probably is increasing as citizens desperately grasp for promised protection.

Some such security systems boast that they are manned by off-duty policemen. This raises questions. If they can protect property while off-duty, why can't they do so while on-duty? Why should citizens pay taxes to support a public police system and then hire another police system to do what the first one can't do?

In the old west, citizens often took a lot of abuse before they rose up and demanded law and order. When law enforcement got tough, outlaws got arrested and got punished. Others got right or got out.