

Bob Blaemne Interview 2018
Author of Book on Sen. Bayh

John Rector spent his college years at the University of California Berkeley after attending a small Catholic school in Bakersfield, CA. Majoring in criminology and political science he found himself aspiring to be involved in juvenile justice reform and bail reform. One of his teaching assistants was Anthony M. Platt, author of a book called The Child Savers: The Invention of Delinquency. He went on to law school at U.C. Hastings in San Francisco. In 1968 he was working in the presidential campaign for Robert Kennedy and was able to meet him and drive him around San Francisco. During that period, he also met Ted Kennedy and found himself an admirer also of Birch Bayh because of his role in civil rights issues.

After the Kennedy assassination, he interviewed with and was hired by Deputy Attorney General Warren Christopher in the Johnson Administration and joined the Department of Justice's honors program, becoming a prosecutor of civil rights cases, especially those involving police brutality. That work brought him into contact with a number of Senate offices, particular those of Phil Hart, Ted Kennedy and Birch Bayh, especially when involved in the investigation of the killings at Kent State and Jackson State in 1970. John met Gordon Alexander at Jackson State after the killings there, Alexander traveling with Birch on that trip. Sometime later, he interviewed with Fritz Mondale for a job and later with both Birch and Marvella at the headquarters of the Bayh presidential campaign, joining the staff on April 1, 1971. He worked directly for chief counsel Larry Speiser on the Senate Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency.

The May Day anti-war protests in May of 1971 brought on considerable disruption in DC, leading to a suspension of civil liberties and mass arrests. On May 3, DC police arrested 7,000 people, ostensibly because many of them were attempting to block traffic but, in reality, it was largely because those arrested fitted the description of a protestor: long hair, bell bottom jeans, facial hair, head bands and beads, etc. It appeared that wearing a jacket and tie made one immune from arrest. When Rector asked police why a group of white-coated medics were being arrested, he was as well, though released shortly afterwards.

John fondly remembers traveling with Birch during the campaign in August, 1971 to his hometown of Bakersfield. On very short notice, he had to deliver Birch's speech for him when a vote on the B-1 Bomber required Birch to leave for Washington.

The Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency held hearings on drug and barbiturate abuse, focusing on athletics at all levels, from Pop Warner football to junior college, college, Olympics and the pros. They also held hearings on methadone and how it had become a replacement drug for heroine, requiring its own regulations to prevent abuse. Birch introduced a bill that became law, The Methadone Diversion Control Act of 1973, setting up the framework for practitioners who administer methadone and for the regulation of methadone itself.

March 1974 (Roll Call article on page 5 called "Rector Involved With The Young") – John was the 30 year old chief counsel of the Senate Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency, replacing Mathea Falco. He pointed out that "At least 50% of the serious crime in this country is committed by young people". Many learned their criminal trade after being incarcerated for lesser, juvenile violations. Judges found themselves caught in a bind. To let a juvenile out of jail brought on damnation from anti-crime advocates. Incarcerating them actually created more serious crime and brought criticism from reformers and civil libertarians. John helped write the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (S. 821). After it passed, a dinner was held in New York by the National Council of Crime and Delinquency at which Birch was to be honored. He was campaigning in Indiana for re-election so Rector substituted for him. President Ford and Attorney General Elliot Richardson were in attendance. It had passed while the campaign year was on and Ford signed it. On Election Day, the *Indianapolis Star* wrote an editorial against it, saying it was going to turn criminals loose to terrorize their communities.

In August 1974, the Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency reported the successful passage into law of a number of measures: The Methadone Diversion Control Act of 1973, reauthorization of the Drug Enforcement Administration, The Black Powder Bill (to regulate the use of recreational firearms), The Runaway Youth Act and The Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974. When Birch completed his service as Chair of the Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency, he had held 75 days of hearings, receiving testimony from 570 witnesses on issues that included juvenile delinquency, black powder usage, drug abuse, school violence, runaways, vandalism, prisons, gun control and a number of nominations to various federal offices. His bill to control the psychotropic drug traffic passed in 1978. One bill he worked hard on, the Pharmacy Robbery Bill, became law after he left the Senate, in May 1984.

The Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974 was an attempt to change the way juveniles were being treated when accused of a crime, too often put in county jails or other adult facilities. One important contributor to the effort was Kenneth Wooden, whose book, Weeping in the Playtime of Others, exposed many of the grim realities of the incarceration system juveniles were exposed to. Wooden's research in the early 1970s contributed to the work being done by Birch's subcommittee to develop the law.

Forty years later, *The Washington Post* wrote an editorial that said "it ended the practice of throwing convicted minors into adult prisons. It greatly curtailed the practice of locking up juveniles for status offenses (offenses adults would not be locked up for) such as truancy...it demanded that states report on racial disparities in the juvenile justice system." (12/22/14). *The New York Times* wrote an editorial "Kids and Jails a Bad Combination...there are few bright spots in America's four-decade long incarceration boom, but one enduring success – amid all the wasted money and ruined lives – has been The Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act, the landmark law passed by Congress in 1974." (email from Rector 12/30/2014) ("Kids and Jails a Bad Combination", *The New York Times*, December 29, 2014, page A16)

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