

PERSONAL ACCOUNTS FROM SURVIVORS  
OF PRISON SEXUAL ASSAULTS

MR. CAHILL: Hello. My name is Tom Cahill. Nearly 40 years ago I was beaten and gang raped for 24 hours in a jail cell in San Antonio, Texas when locked up for civil disobedience.

That assault has changed my life in a way no other event could or should. I was a veteran who served my country honorably in the U.S. Air Force for four years before starting an alternative newspaper.

In 1967, I committed an act of civil disobedience during a labor strike at a factory. Later I was arrested for failing to comply with the terms of my probation, paying \$10 a month for my restitution.

As I walked with a guard to that overcrowded cell, I didn't really know what to expect, but I soon found out. One of the prisoners turned and yelled out, fresh meat. I turned and looked at the guard and he was smiling.

After lights out, that's when it started. Six or seven men beat me and raped my while another two dozen just looked away. I remember being bounced off the walls and the floor and a bunk like a ball in a pinball machine. They put me inside a mattress cover and then set it on fire and someone urinated on it to put the fire out. I kept waiting for the ordeal to end, but it went on and on and on. The guards knew what was going on.

All corrections officials know what goes on in their facilities. They have to know. Their lives depend on it. My cell mate -- one of my cell mates told me later that the guards lied and told them I was a child molester and if they "took care of me, they would get an extra duration of jello. After the assault, they kept me in the cell for two weeks until the bruises started to fade. They wanted to

make sure I learned my lesson. They were sending a message that civil disobedience wouldn't be tolerated. They couldn't silence my descent legally, so they had to resort to extra legal activities.

At first I felt shamed and humiliated over being raped. In turn I realized that it was not my shame, it was my country's shame. And as a veteran, I feel my country has betrayed me. America has a lot to answer for.

After I was released from jail, I tried to live a normal life, but the rape haunted me. I had flashbacks and nightmares. I was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder. My marriage and my business failed. I have been arrested over and over again for acting out. I've had sexual problems. I've been filled with anger for nearly 40 years.

Besides the obvious costs to my life, the rape has taken its toll in dollars and cents, tax dollars and cents. Can you put a cost on an incident of prison rape? I've tried to. I believe

that that one day I spent in jail has cost the Government and the tax payers at least \$300,000.

I've been hospitalized more times than I can count and I didn't pay for those hospitalizations, the tax payers paid. My career as a journalist and photographer was completely derailed, which means lost income tax and spending power. For the past two decades, I've received a nonservice connected security pension from the Veteran's Administration at the cost of about \$200,000 in connection with the only major trauma I've ever suffered, the rape.

I'm only one man. It's hard to say how many men and women are the victims of sexual assault behind bars each year. But with two million people in prison at any given time in this country, I think it's a significant number. I've never been able to find an accountant who could calculate the cost of prison rate, but I believe it costs us millions and millions of dollars.

Although some people think the threat of rape behind bars keeps people from becoming criminals, the truth is prison rape creates more criminals and

more and worse criminals and violent criminals.

It takes minor criminals and turns them into violent felons. It creates angry young men and women. Rape in prison just creates more crime.

I urge this commission to do everything in its power to make our prisons and jails safer by preventing sexual abuse behind bars. In addition to saving a lot of money, you will be saving a lot of lives.

I also urge this commission, as well as every member of the criminal justice system to heed the words of Victor Hugo more than a century ago. "We shall one day come to look upon crime as a disease, physicians shall displace judges and hospitals and gallows. We shall pour oil and bond where we formerly applied iron and fire and evil will be treated with charity instead of in anger, a change simple and sublime. The gentle laws of Christ will penetrate at last into the cove and shine through its enactments." Thank you very much.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you also,  
Mr. Cahill, for your presentation.