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## Former FBI Director Louis Freeh paints dark picture of corruption at Miami ethics conference

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Louis Freeh, the former FBI director during the Clinton administration, on Friday painted a bleak portrait of public and private corruption in America.

Freeh said that no matter how much authorities try to stop certain politicians, business people and others from stealing, he doesn't "see any deterrent effect" because their behavior seems to be getting worse rather than better.

"We have a huge challenge ahead of us," Freeh told law enforcement and government officials attending a public corruption conference at the Miami Police Department Training Center. "We don't seem to be having an impact in the corruption area. We certainly don't seem to be having it in corporate America, in our financial institutions."

Freeh offered his unvarnished views as the guest speaker for the two-day training conference, presented by the Miami-Dade Commission on Ethics and Public Trust. Freeh, 63, a New Jersey native who served as an FBI agent, prosecutor and federal judge, was the bureau's director from September 1993 to June 2001.

During his speech, Freeh praised former U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno, a Miami native who served in Washington during his tenure as FBI director, calling her "fearless" because "she was not afraid to say no to people on both sides of the aisle."

Freeh was introduced by Reno's successor as Miami-Dade state attorney, Katherine Fernández Rundle, and the ethics commission's executive director, former prosecutor Joseph Centorino. More than a decade ago, they won convictions against about 60 defendants, including Miami Commissioner Humberto Hernandez, in the aftermath of the city's fraud-ridden 1997 mayoral election.

Rundle reminded the audience of the difficulty of proving crimes of corruption, such as bribery, because they "are never committed at gunpoint," adding that the greatest challenge is "to prove that a crime actually took place."

During his speech, Freeh noted that many people — from workers in local governments to Washington, D.C., to Wall Street — have not learned life's lessons that it's wrong to lie, cheat and steal. "Corruption is endemic to the human experience," he said, saying it goes back centuries.

Freeh said the country's lack of ethics is out of control today. "It's pernicious throughout our society," he said.

“It’s in our sports programs,” added Freeh, who was hired by Penn State to investigate the university football program’s sex-abuse scandal. “It’s in our educational system,” he said, alluding to a school test-cheating probe in Atlanta.

But Freeh, who pointed out that South Florida was ranked No. 1 for federal prosecutions of healthcare and other white-collar fraud, was not all darkness during his address.

Freeh told the story of his FBI swearing-in ceremony at the White House in 1993. He and his wife debated whether to bring their four young sons to the historic event — and with good reason, as it turned out.

Before the ceremony, the 2-year-old son pushed his 4-year-old brother into a pond near the Rose Garden, leaving him soaking wet.

President Bill Clinton thought it was funny. After the ceremony, he brought the Freeh family into the Oval Office. Standing in front of the 2-year-old, the president asked him: “Did you push your brother in the pond?”

“No,” the toddler answered.

The audience erupted in laughter.

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