Description
Phil Donahue interviews Mayor Jane Byrne about her move into Cabrini-Green, a notorious public housing project in Chicago. She discusses the war on crime and what is being done to improve the living conditions there.

Keywords
Law Enforcement, Richard Daly, Education, Chicago, Illinois, Mayor Jane Byrne, Crime, Housing Project, Cabrini-Green, Public War, Precautions, Danger, Noise, Activity, Downtown, Assistance, Children, Food, Co-op, Cheaper, Help, Complex, Residence, Facility, Market, Business, Criminals, Poor, Drugs, Robert Taylor, City, Costs, Development, Apartments, Parking Lot

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Transcript
Chicago Mayor Jane Byrne Moves into Cabrini-Green Housing Project

TOM BROKAW, anchor:
Mayor Jane Byrne of Chicago is nothing if not colorful and controversial and this morning Phil Donahue talks with her about one of her most dramatic moves.

PHIL DONAHUE reporting:
Good morning, Tom. It’s hard to imagine something that gained more attention in the history of American cities than the move of Mayor Jane Byrne into, as a resident, into a Chicago Housing Authority Project known as Cabrini-Green. You weren’t scared?

Mayor JANE BYRNE (Chicago, Illinois): No, I wasn’t scared at all.

DONAHUE: You got letters from children suggesting that you should-- you should have been.

BYRNE: Well, I’m not going to tell you that I didn’t recognize the dangers of the community and I didn’t-- it isn’t that I am an ego person that thinks it isn’t going to happen to you but we took every precaution that you can possibly take.

DONAHUE: Yeah. Did you sleep you at night?

BYRNE: Well it’s such an active place that I didn’t sleep a lot at night. I was too-- I was too interested in seeing what was going on there and a lot goes on. And I was very busy at the window.

DONAHUE: Did you have cockroaches?

BYRNE: Yes, I did have cockroaches.

DONAHUE: Let me show, once again, Cabrini-Green to our viewers. Here is a-- you’ll see an aerial view of the-- of the area as well as-- there’s downtown Chicago, Cabrini-Green in the foreground there. Um, this is the unit in which the mayor of Chicago resided. This is your husband as he came to look over his new apartment.

Unidentified Reporter: What are your impressions to far?
JAY McMULLEN: Well, I like it.
DONAHUE: And he did like it. And apparently his comment was sincere and the mayor spent how many nights there? About?
BYRNE: We’re still spending nights there. Uh, two we stayed there, almost three solid weeks, then we went in for two nights, then we went on a week’s vacation. We’re going to continue to go back there.
DONAHUE: In the Cabrini-Green housing complex, there are 13,626 residents who reside in a total of 3,591 different apartments. There are 3,558 adult residents on assistance in this complex. The rest of the residents are children, minors, almost, well, over 9,000.
One of the things that happened as a result of you’re moving in there is a co-op.
BYRNE: Yes, food co-op.
DONAHUE: Uh, how’s that work? There’s a mon--
BYRNE: It’s working excellently. The food is terrific-- the more people are signing up. They get it 30 or 40 percent cheaper than in a store and as you pointed out, these people are on assistance, they need every bit of help they can get.
DONAHUE: Now, you resided in the Cabrini-Green complex, and now you’re spending most of your time in your own residence which is closer to the downtown area, and is obviously a residence that’s a lot nicer than the facility available at Cabrini-Green. Most of the people in Chicago felt that your move there was sincere. The poll--
BYRNE: They really like it. I mean, people both black and white thought that it was good and I’ll tell you why. Cabrini is not that far, it’s twelve minutes from downtown Chicago. It’s affecting the housing market around there, it’s effecting the business community around there. You get criminals that move in there, take over an apartment because people are poor and oppressed, they go up and rob on the north side of Chicago, sell their drugs, sell their guns, and come back and hide out in there. I can see why it was well accepted.
DONAHUE: Cabrini-Green got all the attention but it is not the largest Chicago Housing Authority Project.
BYRNE: No. Robert Taylor.
DONAHUE: This is the Robert Taylor Housing Project where you spoke on Mother’s Day.
BYRNE (Robert Taylor Project): I specifically admire the mothers in the public housing projects around Chicago because I’ve seen their love, I’ve seen their caring. I’ve seen the way they attempt to bring up their children with very little means. And I want to tell you from one mother to another, I’m not going to let you down. We are going to help you. And to all of you, Happy Mother’s Day.
DONAHUE: There are 19,785 residents at Robert Taylor, the largest public housing development in the country. These people reside in 4,230 apartments. There are 4,651 adult residents on assistance at Robert Taylor alone. And over 14,000 children live at this facility. There are 28 different elevator buildings at Robert Taylor.
What are your thoughts about the whole idea of the vertical--
BYRNE: Well, it’s bad. It was bad-- It was a bad concept, it should have never been done, but it’s done. And if you consider that versus having nowhere to live, I suppose you would say, if you were very poor,
“at least I have a roof over my head.” But it’s the worst thing that could possibly happen to a family. DONAHUE: What’s a better thing now-- BYRNE: Every family-- every family I met with said the only thing they would like is to get out. DONAHUE: What do you-- what’s your recommendation? BYRNE: Well, I think number one, we are attempting, and we-- we have a new assistant over at CHA, who is attempting to move those with large families to the lower floors. You know if you’re up on the fourteenth floor, you know that there are gang members in the building, you know that they have guns, you’re children cannot go out and play. So they’re going to play in the hallways, and that’s what they do. They’re poor, they don’t have blackboards, they don’t have coloring books, so they’re going to scribble on walls. All right, psychologically, a child is going to play. So what we’re trying to do is move them down to the lower floors and move those with adult children or even seniors to higher floors, all right, because they don’t want to get out the same way a child does. Then we’re bringing in all sorts of sports compounds into the various projects so that they have somewhere to go, that they have something to do. DONAHUE: How do you respond to those people who say, “Whatever good may have developed as a result of your residence there, at Cabrini, it is temporary?” You’re gone now, you are a person, who probably will run for reelection and that this was a kind of hotdog, highly visible, one-time only thing that got you a lot of attention but as-- we’re going to be back to normal here very shortly. BYRNE: We’re never going back to what was normal for Cabrini-Green. Never. The intimidation there was so bad that it took three nights after I moved in there before you even knew that they were going to back off. Pulling up in trucks at night, when you say what I did I do at night, driving through the parking lot with their arms folded and staring up at the building and full-scale police knowing that all the children and all the teenagers saw them take us back out night after night. Firecrackers going off in hallways so you’d think it was guns, fires being set in the garbage incinerator. It was a really very entrenched, ugly situation. If you go there, by the time the three weeks was up, I was really sort of happy that Easter was there and that I was, that I was not-- you get emotionally involved, and you do. You see all-- thousands of children whose lives could be hopeless. And then sending little notes in for Easter like, “Can I go to mass with you?” Dyeing Easter eggs, they’re poor, and they send you a little egg and they say, “We love you, thank you for coming.” DONAHUE: Did this city abandon that? BYRNE: Yes they did. DONAHUE: In other words, the whole bureaucracy, establishment, law enforcement, walked away-- BYRNE: Everything. Excepting for the teachers. The educational system there was in good shape. DONAHUE: It is a-- BYRNE: And the press walked away. DONAHUE: You thought so? BYRNE: Well, you can turn on TV many times and find out about starving children in foreign countries. You can find out about crime in Atlanta, but nobody seemed to care if it was Cabrini. DONAHUE: You entered political life very much a friend of Mayor Richard Daly, one of the most famous and powerful names in the history of urban politics. And it’s pretty much agreed now that you will
be running against his son for re-election when your term is up.
BYRNE: I’m not running against anybody right now, I’m running for the city.
DONAHUE: You understand the anticipation though of what just might be one of the most dramatic collisions in the history of Chicago politics.
BYRNE: I-- I-- I-- I understand the media’s great desire to have it so that they can cover this great confrontation.
DONAHUE: You don’t have any doubt that Richy Daly will be your adversary?
BYRNE: I can only take him at his word and I would assume the citizens would, who-- he’s stated as a candidate, he would not run for mayor.
DONAHUE: Don’t you feel-- Oh, and you’re saying you don’t-- therefore, if he’s a man of his word, he won’t run?
BYRNE: Well I certainly don’t like people that change their mind.
DONAHUE: With time only to thank. Mayor Jane Byrne of Chicago. Thanks.
BYRNE: Nice being with you and I knew you’d get one in there.
DONAHUE: This is Phil-- this is Phil Donahue in Chicago, now back to the TODAY Show in New York.