

Public safety: Where we've been and where we're headed

BY ROBERT A. LOVINGOOD

Violent crime is a growing problem both nationally and locally.

In small towns, suburbs and large cities across the nation, violent crime rate increases in 2015 and 2016 represent the largest single-year increases in the national violent crime rate since 1991. In 2015, the United States saw the largest jump in the murder rate since 1968.

In the High Desert, we have also seen sharp increases in crime. So I'd like to share with you what we're doing.

Since I took office in December 2012, funds have been allocated for the Sheriff's summertime crime sweeps in partnership with High Desert cities. This year's "Operation Desert Guardian" included 20 separate operations between June and September, resulting in 834 arrests, including 150 felony and 684 misdemeanor arrests. The Sheriff's Department has also added a fifth Homicide Team to investigate and solve murder cases across the county.

Furthermore, because of policies promoted by Sacramento politicians, Sheriff John McMahon restructured the Narcotics Division in 2015 by combining both Gang and Narcotics units under one umbrella. The unit focuses the Department's resources on criminal street gangs, utilizing proactive enforcement and intervention measures specifically designed to enhance public safety.

It is proving to be an effective strategy.

Another element of our strategy is the "GIT"-- the Gang Intelligence Team. It is a task force comprised of Sheriff's Department personnel and personnel from the FBI, Probation, CHP, and San Bernardino Police Department who handle complex investigations. The GIT conducted three large-scale investigations resulting in the arrest of 85 gang members for major felonies (most are facing multiple-year sentences). They also assisted homicide with two unsolved murders, resulting in the arrest of five suspects for murder.

These strategies are working. But we need to do more.

That's why the Board of Supervisors passed \$1 million in supplemental funding so the Sheriff can conduct "Desert Guardian" style operations around the County *all year long*. The Sheriff is implementing targeted enforcement focused on repeat offenders. And the Sheriff's Gangs and Narcotics Division will be leading the pressure on the criminals destroying our neighborhoods.

Many crimes that once were felonies in California are now only misdemeanors. Criminals who just a few years ago were doing time in state prison are now roaming our communities around the state. At the same time, the state is pushing other hardened, career criminals into our county jails, taking up valuable jail space. So I am advocating for a phased staffing plan to open the remaining portion of the Sheriff's High Desert Detention Center to house more inmates. With a price tag of about \$30 million a year, that will be a heavy lift. But I am committed to working to find a solution.

Many of the crime problems that cities and counties have to deal with are the result of policies created by Sacramento that reduce criminal sentences and release inmates, putting more criminals on our streets.

But there is good news. The nonprofit California Public Safety Partnership on Oct. 30 filed a statewide ballot initiative with the California Secretary of State to prevent the early release of child traffickers, rapists and other violent offenders. The proposed ballot measure would also fix other serious problems being caused by recent criminal justice reforms. The measure is supported by law enforcement, public safety leaders, crime victims, child advocates and business leaders.

Our crime problems were not created overnight and they won't be resolved overnight, either. I hope you will support our men and women who put their own safety at risk every day to protect our families.

Robert Lovingood is chairman of the San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors representing the First District.

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