
How to fight violent crime without raising taxes

By Joseph W. Brady / Contributed Content

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Having laid out the case against a sales tax increase earmarked for public safety in my most recent Valley Voices column I am writing to offer some alternatives for addressing violent crime without raising taxes:

Cities and the county should file a claim with the Commission on State Mandates to recover the costs of Propositions 47 and 57 and AB 953, the Racial and Identity Profiling Act. Although both Proposition 47 (which downgraded crimes such as shoplifting, forgery and drug possession to misdemeanors and allowed those convicted to renegotiate their punishments) and 57 (which increased parole chances for convicted felons while increasing prisoners' credit for good behavior) were craftily written to avoid triggering provisions of California law that require the state to reimburse local governments for unfunded mandates, these measures have clearly imposed costs upon our communities.

Similarly, the reporting requirements of AB 953 are so onerous that they have actually taken cops off the street to file state-mandated reports. Our cities and the county should submit a claim to the Commission on State Mandates, which is empowered to hear and act on claims that the state has imposed a reimbursable mandate on local agencies.

Propose a state initiative or legislation requiring that prisoners released from federal, state or county prisons and jails be returned to their communities of origin. Correctional facilities should not be allowed to dump released convicts into vulnerable High Desert cities as was revealed in a recent Daily Press article. State law should require released prisoners to be returned to the communities in which they resided at the time of their conviction.

Adopt local ordinances requiring correctional facilities to notify the city in advance with the dates, time, location and identities of prisoners to be released into their cities. It is absurd that vans (sometimes unmarked) can simply drop off

groups of released prisoners into our communities without at least notifying local officials of their impending arrival. On behalf of my colleagues in the local business community I strongly urge City Councils to take immediate action to stop this practice.

Increase private security patrols. With the annual cost of a sheriff's deputy or local beat cop exceeding \$100,000 and sometimes \$200,000 including overtime and benefits, shopping centers, downtown business and homeowner's associations should consider hiring private security officers to patrol areas vulnerable to violent crime.

Expand Neighborhood Watch programs and patrols. Every neighborhood on the High Desert needs an active watch program that includes not only reporting suspicious activities to law enforcement authorities but also volunteer patrols to help keep our neighborhoods safe. Under the forceful leadership of its former president, Becky Otwell, the High Desert Association of Realtors has been on record in support of Neighborhood Watch since 2015.

Hire and mentor more young people. Organizations should redouble their efforts to hire young workers into paying jobs, reducing their vulnerability to recruitment into lives of crime. Older High Desert residents who have had successful careers should consider mentoring at-risk young people to show them how to become productive citizens.

The alternatives I've outlined focus mainly on enforcement because I believe that it offers the best chance of immediate results. Others can surely contribute ideas centered on prevention and treatment that may offer longer term benefits. My interest in this issue stems, in part, from the challenges that I and other commercial real estate brokers have encountered recruiting businesses to the area in light of its reputation for high crime. This is a matter of utmost importance that demands serious and widespread public discussion.

Finally, regarding that dialogue, the Daily Press, in response to my call for a public forum to discuss violent crime in the High Desert, has agreed to host a Facebook Live discussion at its offices on Oct. 2 in which numerous local leaders have already agreed to participate. Residents will be invited to participate in the forum by submitting their questions and comments via Facebook.

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