

Why we must protect those who protect us

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Many of us have heard someone state, “There’s never a Cop around when you need one!” or in reference to a traffic citation, someone asks the Officer out of frustration, “Don’t you have better things to do, like catching the real criminals?” These things are often said out of emotion, but bring light to a serious topic.

We are all quite fortunate, I would say we are blessed, to live in a country that is free of tyranny and oppression. We do not live in fear of being imprisoned for speaking our minds or living by our convictions, as long as we do not impede upon the rights of others. However, as liberating as the American mindset is, we do not live in a utopian society. Many Americans still lock their doors at night, many Americans arm themselves for personal protection, and we all recognize that it is not wise to walk down a dark alley at night in an area that is known for crime.

Who do we turn to when we seek protection from those who wish to do us harm? Who do we call if we fear for our safety? In terms of our neighborhoods and communities, who do we expect to protect us and come to the rescue?

We honor our military and recognize that our service men and women are our frontline of defense in safeguarding and protecting our freedom and our American way of life against those who wish to do this nation harm. On a macroeconomic scale, no one would dare question the importance and need of a well staffed, well trained fighting force of service men and women. However, on a microeconomic scale, in our own backyard, do we place the same amount of importance on the principle of protecting ourselves and our way of life?

All across this nation there are counties and municipalities that are experiencing drastic fiscal cuts in public safety, more specifically, Police Departments and Sheriff’s Offices are facing a financial crisis that is quickly becoming viewed as crippling. Your next door neighbor may argue, “This is a relatively safe community! We have never had a problem with crime.” In reviewing these two statements, ask yourself, “Why is that? Is it because of a proactive Police Department or is it due to a lack of criminal element?”

If it is due to a strong and proactive Police Department or Sheriff's Office, then consider yourself fortunate. Furthermore, ask yourself again, "If we were to cut funding to our Police Department or Sheriff's Office, would the community be impacted?" The answer to this question leads into the second question above, in reference to a lack of criminal element.

With very few exceptions, there is not a community in this country that is not somehow or someday impacted by crime. The criminal element does exist! They are out there! This is a grim reality that many individuals and families refuse to accept. If you are one of the fortunate ones that find yourself living in a suburb community or county outside of a major metropolitan area, I suggest that it is only a matter of time before the criminal element from the major metropolitan area flows into the surrounding areas.

In economics there is a saying, "Retail follows the rooftops." This is a phrase used to describe the economic growth of a community, meaning that storefronts and businesses will follow residential development. With growing infrastructure and added roadways, it is no longer required to live close to your place of employment. Many families do not wish to live in large industrialized cities that are often viewed as having more sidewalks than trees. Therefore, families are more often than not, moving outward from the cities and raising their children in what many would consider more traditional neighborhoods. These families often consider things such as school systems, lifestyle, shopping and entertainment, and of course safety.

The truth is no one wants to move their family to a community that is riddled with crime, or a community in which local law enforcement is simply struggling to keep the crime waves at bay. Families long for a chance to raise their children in a thriving community, to enroll their children in a good school system, and not be in fear of taking a walk through the neighborhood at night.

With the exception of the growing trend of electronic and financial crimes, these communities are often found, comparatively speaking, to be far from the Hollywood image of crime ridden cities. We should explore however, these cities that we constantly read about in the newspaper, that are continually reporting the latest homicide or home invasion, were not always in such a condition. The crime trend grows exponentially over time. It is often referred to as a slippery slope. An unsolved property crime or a rise in graffiti, over time, may lend itself to a random violent crime, which in time grows into a trend that is hard to recover from.

Detroit for example was once a thriving city of industry. Successful business men and women called Detroit home and raised their families in this all-American city. Over a very short period of time, crime crept in, families moved out of the city, houses became vacant, tax revenue dwindled, and the law enforcement community found itself in a reactionary state rather a proactive state of operations. From news reports, we now understand that it is not uncommon for a citizen to call 911 to report an emergency and be told, "I'm sorry sir, we do not have an Officer available to respond."

I would suspect that if the community leaders of this great American city could turn back the hands of time they would realize the importance of investing in public safety. The topic of alleged political corruption aside, it is without question that it was the decaying sense of safety that led to families relocating away from the city.

Just as I cited above, "Retail follows the rooftops" such is true about empty homes, abandoned properties, and failing schools. These retailers, our local job market, will not be able to recruit the best and brightest or offer the highest quality of service or product if potential employees are not willing to live in the area. As a result, companies and corporations relocate and the tax base dwindles. Without adequate funding for city or county services, quality of life in the community suffers.

What is the ultimate cause to this dismal effect? Crime! Since there is so much that rest on keeping our communities safe, not just for a sense of security, but as an investment in the longevity of the success of our community, why would we not want to safeguard our Police Departments and Sheriff's Offices? I would further ask why would we not want the absolute best and brightest.

As an example, I enjoy shopping at Publix and eating at Chick-fil-A. The reason is quite simple, I enjoy the service. When I find myself in a Publix grocery store, a clerk is eager to ask if I need assistance. They are friendly and courteous. The same is true for Chick-fil-A. However, if I find myself in a competitor's grocery store or other fast food restaurant, I often realize the difference in service. In questioning the difference between these two market examples, I discovered that Publix and Chick-fil-A are quite particular in their hiring practices. They offer competitive benefits and pay in a market that would otherwise be considered minimum wage. They invest in their employees in such a way that each employee feels a sense of ownership in the company's overall success. The employees are performing the same job as their competitors, but there is a difference in their professionalism and their desire to serve for the common good of the company's mission.

Applying the same mindset to law enforcement, there are some departments in this country that are in such a position that their Police Officers and Sheriff's Deputies are being paid minimum wage. My economics professor from college often said, "You get what you pay for!" There are other communities across this country that are fortunate enough to invest in their law enforcement officers and their hiring practices are quite stringent. As a result these Police Departments and Sheriff's Offices are able to hire Officers and Deputies that often compare to the quality of personnel one would find at the federal agencies, such as the FBI.

There is so much that is dependent on keeping our communities safe. The slightest increase in crime trends can have devastating effects on a city or county. I feel certain that the current residents of Detroit would agree and when faced with an emergency ask themselves, "Where is a Cop when you need one?"



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