
High Desert leaders: Collaboration key to solving crime problems

By Staff Reports

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VICTORVILLE — A contingent of High Desert leaders stressed collaboration is the key to solving the region's crime problem during a Facebook Live forum at the Daily Press office on Monday morning.

The meeting lost its three most prominent panelists — First District Supervisor Robert Lovingood, Sheriff John McMahan and District Attorney Mike Ramos — when news of the Las Vegas concert attack broke in the early morning hours. All three men were concentrating on supporting county employees or the families of county employees who were injured or killed at the Route 91 Festival.

The forum also was beset early on by technical difficulties. However, once those had been ironed out the discussion proved to be educational and fruitful on a number of levels.

The panelists were Victor Valley College Trustee and local businessman Joseph W. Brady, Adelanto Mayor Richard Kerr, Apple Valley Mayor Scott Nassif, Hesperia Mayor Paul Russ, Barstow City Councilman Rich Harpole, Victorville City Councilman Jim Cox, Assemblyman Jay Obernolte's District Director Ross Sevy, and Daily Press Editor and Interim Publisher Steve Hunt. Also in attendance were Apple Valley interim Town Manager Lori Lamson, Hesperia City Manager Nils Bentsen and Victorville City Manager Doug Robertson.

Brady originally called for the forum in an op-ed column published in the Daily Press. Ramos got the ball rolling by calling Hunt to commit to taking part.

Nassif brought news of a resolution passed unanimously by the League of California Cities on Sept. 15 in Sacramento that would 1) Direct staff to consider creating a task force to report on unintended consequences of recent and future criminal law (such as AB 109, the prisoner early release legislation); 2) To

promote an amendment to AB 109 to changed the criteria justifying the release of inmates to include their criminal and mental health history instead of only their last criminal conviction; 3) to advocate to change the definition of a violent offense in Section 32 of Article I of the state Constitution; and 4) to call for Gov. Jerry Brown and the Legislature to work with the League of California Cities and other stakeholders to consider and implement criminal justice reform.

“Cities are getting behind looking at the unintended consequences of AB 109 and Propositions 47 and 57,” Nassif said. “Maybe the League needs to put an initiative on the (statewide) ballot” to reverse some of these laws.

The entire panel seemed to be in agreement with that, noting that cities bear the brunt of the impact of these measures and have little way to counteract them. Harpole said law enforcement can arrest criminals over and over, but if they are continually being released there was little reason to even think about adding more officers or deputies to fight the rising crime rate, which McMahon said earlier this summer was up 20 percent just for violent offenses so far this year.

Not all were willing to say more officers wouldn't help, though. Victorville has a measure on the ballot on Nov. 7, just a little more than a month away, that would raise the city's sales tax by a half-cent and earmark the money specifically for sheriff's deputies and firefighters. Cox said if voters pass the measure, the city would be able to add 10 deputies, 15 firefighters and reopen a closed fire station.

“In Victorville's case, we have recognized for some time that we had to get the word out that we support residents, but they need to support us,” he said. “We have a hard time overcoming the trust issue — government is bad, they're stealing our money. Please get involved, support your community. You are the eyes and ears. It'll be a better community with your involvement.”

Russ and Kerr both said all the city leaders in the High Desert were committed to working together to solve problems, particularly crime.

“It's the solutions that we need,” Russ said. “It takes a collaborative effort to come up with solutions.”

Kerr said Adelanto had been able to bring on three more deputies and would look to increase that as its budget situation brightens via medical marijuana revenue.

“We need to expand our conversation with other agencies and organizations,” Nassif said. “Everybody wants to have a good quality of life, including a good place to live and low crime.”

Brady stressed out-of-the-box solutions and noted that the High Desert would never attract the employers and residents it needs to continue to grow without addressing the issue once and for all.

To view a recording of the forum, visit the Daily Press’ website at vvdailypress.com.

Hunt said the Daily Press will push to continue the conversation with more forums and said he hoped future ones would be held at public locations, such as Victor Valley College, so residents who were interested could attend.



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