
Violent crime and the future of the Victor Valley

By Joseph W. Brady

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Across a five-day period during the last week of May, the parking lots of three top High Desert retailers in each of the Victor Valley's three largest cities were the scene of gun violence. On May 26th, a fatal shooting believed to have resulted from a drug deal gone awry took place at the Home Depot in Victorville. Three days later on Memorial Day, a man was shot in the back of the head in front of a Super Target store in Apple Valley, followed by a fatal police-involved shooting stemming from a car theft incident at the Hesperia Wal-Mart store.

The good news is that in each of these three cases the perpetrators were apprehended, shot or killed by law enforcement personnel shortly after committing their crimes. The bad news is that these lifelong criminals were loose on our streets to wreak havoc, spreading fear among our citizens and feeding the perception among potential investors and employers that the High Desert is an unsafe place in which to conduct business. The bloody manner in which the month of May ended in our community should be viewed as a wake-up call to local and regional leaders.

The clear message is that we need to take back our Valley from the criminal element that runs increasingly rampant through our homes, neighborhoods, shops and public spaces.

Neither the press, nor the business community, nor the law-abiding citizens that still comprise the majority of our population are responsible for the circumstances we now confront.

It is no secret that the High Desert, with its low-cost housing made more abundant by the market crash of 2008, has become a dumping ground for individuals for whom crime against others is a way of life. The 2011 passage of

AB 109 (Public Safety Realignment), which reduced periods of incarceration and shifted thousands of state inmates to overcrowded county facilities who were, in turn, released to low-cost communities including the High Desert; and Propositions 47 (2014) and 57 (2016), which converted many “non-violent” felonies, including drug and property offenses, to misdemeanors and increased credit for time served, releasing even more criminals onto our streets, are the primary culprits in the jarring transition of our community from a place where hard-working men and women could hope to raise their families in peace and prosperity to a region that is being abandoned by the sons and daughters of these families in search of a safer place to raise their own children.

Consider the fact that none of the perpetrators of the three violent crimes that befell our cities at the end of May are strangers to the criminal justice system. The Target and Home Depot shooters have had a combined 15 serious criminal cases in the San Bernardino County court system, not counting their numerous traffic violations. Not surprisingly, many of these arrests were for the very types of offenses, such as drug and property crimes, whose punishment was softened by the above referenced initiatives, which passed with the support of coastal liberals who outnumbered the opposing votes in the communities most likely to be affected by softer sentencing, early prison releases and the reclassification of felonies to misdemeanors.

Simply put, every one of these offenders should have been behind bars, not free to roam the streets of our cities, armed and willing to do harm to our citizens.

As long as the state’s legislative and executive branches continue to be dominated by liberal coastal elites who outnumber their more conservative counterparts in the valleys and deserts our communities are unlikely to be granted relief by changes in state laws. Instead it is up to us to make a stand to confront the conditions that we now face.

With this in mind I am calling for all local officials, as well as county and state officials who represent our region, to convene an emergency public meeting to discuss what are we going to do to take back our Valley and to send a message to the criminal element and to those who continue to desecrate what was once a great place to live, work and play that this type of behavior will no longer be tolerated.

We need to increase our vigilance, expand the resources available to law enforcement agencies and fight back against those who would destroy our community.

The alternative is to do nothing while our communities fall deeper into deterioration and despair, our efforts to attract new businesses to relocate here increasingly fall on deaf ears and we continue to lose our youth to places where they feel more engaged, more safe and more willing to take risk, even if these new communities are more expensive and further from the towns in which they grew up.

Please join me in urging your elected officials to take an immediate stand against the growing violence that afflicts us.

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