

POLICE POLICY

Better ways to deal with mental illness

I was a police officer for more than 35 years, after which I spent 12 years with a local school district. During my time with the school district, much of my work centered on safety and security. I am also trained in the field of threat assessment and management, which most police officers are not. Currently, I am a consultant in organizational safety, security and emergency management. From my perspective, the recent vengeful act of mass violence in Isla Vista illustrates some issues that must be improved when dealing with this type of incident.

First, the reoccurring gun debate is just a convenient red herring. It is easy to focus on firearms, because it is emotional and avoids the more difficult questions, which are centered on balancing the freedoms of individuals affected by mental illness with community safety.

Second, police practices must be reviewed and changed.

Threat-assessment practitioners know that out of 1,000 or even 10,000 mentally ill people, some of whom make threats, it is nearly impossible to accurately determine who is a threat to the health and safety of others. That being said, even with a low base rate of mass-violence incidents, we are getting better at identifying those to whom we should pay attention.

Other countries have faced the issues of forced intervention with the mentally ill and have established programs that, while perhaps not perfect, do try to



JAE C. HONG, ASSOCIATED PRESS

People gather May 25 at a park in Isla Vista for a vigil to honor victims of the shootings and stabbings.

protect and help. The Problem Behavior Program in Melbourne, Australia, and the threat-assessment procedures of the Naval Criminal Investigative Service are both examples of processes designed to help individuals and protect the community at large.

California law allows police officers to take those exhibiting signs of mental illness into custody for professional evaluation if any one of three conditions is met. However, police officers themselves are, for the most part, not mental health professionals. My experience is that the evaluations performed by

police officers are often shallow and not conducted with the thoroughness of other investigations.

Police officers responding to these types of situations should be accompanied by a mental health professional who is trained in threat assessment and management. This would support the police in their duty to make a determination that might result in involuntary custody and would allow for a professional-level discussion between the law enforcement agency and the designated evaluating professional.

It is not unheard of that a

person planning a mass-violence incident legally purchases weapons for this purpose. Yet it appears as if state gun registries are just repositories for paper. Any young person, especially students, who makes multiple purchases of expensive military or law enforcement firearms over a short period of time should raise red flags and trigger an inquiry. Software is available for searching social media sites that would enhance law enforcement's ability to discover relevant self-publications. Publication of self-generated violent media is another red flag that

cannot be ignored. Parental involvement, a therapist and law enforcement should have produced a better outcome. The tragedy at Isla Vista was not averted. Perhaps, we will never be able to prevent all incidents of mass violence, but it does not mean that we should continue to focus in the wrong direction, avoiding tough questions about how to help both potentially violent people, as well as their families and potential victims.

Law enforcement should have the support of mental health professionals trained in threat assessment and management when making an initial field assessment and when conferring with the designated evaluating mental health professional.

Each initial mental health evaluation conducted by law enforcement should generate a written report that includes a checklist ensuring that the steps for a thorough investigation, including firearms information and social media searches, were undertaken.

The fear of infringing on the rights of individuals is real and well-founded. However, we must always remember that, although we can restore an individual's right of self-determination, we cannot unbury the victims of Columbine, Virginia Tech, Arapahoe, Isla Vista and the other incidents where mass violence was perpetrated by those who might have been helped.

Mike Pollok
Orange

Millennials: the American Dream is worth fighting for

Last Sunday, I was treated to a rousing speech by Rep. Loretta Sanchez of the 46th Congressional District. Unlike some of my fellow graduates from Cal State, Fullerton, I chose to attend the large commencement ceremony, where I was thoroughly inspired about how Titans "reach higher!" I am thankful I went.

Why? In short, we (my generation: the millennials) have been sold a lie, and those who lied just fessed up. I'll come back to this.

During Sanchez's speech, which was pretty non-partisan and tame, she tried to loosen the crowd up with some easy jokes. With her incredibly shrill voice, she made the easy ones about partying and staying up late.

She then made a comment about us, the graduates, being grateful to our parents for allowing us to move back in after college. While the exact words escape me, I remember the laughter she received from the crowd, even from myself.

But why were we laughing? Were we laughing out of denial? No, I don't think so. Were we laughing because she was actually funny? No, absolutely not. I'd wager to guess many were laughing out of defeat.

You see, millennials were sold a lie. We know the statistics. We know that, as of 2012, 44 percent of recent grads were underemployed. We know that wages are essentially stagnant, and we know that it is now the norm to move back home.

Back in 2008 and 2012 we were sold the lie that our loving big (government) brother would have our backs. President Barack Obama himself was going to heal the planet. Cue eye roll.

Well, now that businesses are

discouraged from employing more than 50 workers and working them more than 30 hours, all I have to say is, "Thanks Obama." Oh, and in case you were wondering, Loretta Sanchez voted for Obamacare.

Millennials, it's time we woke up. Obama, Sanchez and their big government advocates have promised us that bigger government is the solution to our jobs crisis in America. This was similar to the Cal State University system claiming we needed to pass Proposition 30 so student fees would not go up. If we continue to allow ourselves to be bamboozled by those who rob us of the American dream, then we have no one to blame but ourselves.

As for this millennial, I choose to believe in myself and the promise of the American dream, a dream where I and my fellow graduates are not shackled by an overbearing government; but, one

in which I am free to risk, fail and succeed on my own merits.

Sorry, Ms. Sanchez, this is one millennial who will not settle for moving back home.

Seth Morrison
Fullerton

CHARTER SCHOOLS BIG PART OF PUBLIC EDUCATION

A recent letter separated public schools from charter schools and stated that charter-school funding takes away from "public education" ["Public education, not charters is our priority," Opinion, May 18].

Correction. Charter schools are public schools paid for by taxpayers, just like traditional schools. However, a charter school gets less funding per student than traditional public schools. According to the California Charter School Association, the per-pupil deficit for charters can exceed more than \$1,000 in some cases.

There is an incorrect perception in the public that school districts are entitled to the proverbial dollars every student represents in their district zone.

Just because a child lives in a particular district does not guarantee that district gets those dollars. Parents can choose to home-school, send their child to private school or send their child to a public charter school.

If a parent decides to send the child to a charter school, those tax dollars follow the child (at a lesser cost than traditional schools). The child has a right to that choice under the law. Further, a child attending a charter school does not take funds away from public education because charter schools are also part of public education.

The writer also talked about choices within a school district.

This is a nice thought, but the reality, as many parents are finding out this year, is that transferring schools within a district is very difficult to do.

The "good schools" within a district are often impacted, making such an option impossible. This leaves some desperate parents to make a decision to move out of the district, falsify their residency or find another choice for their child's education.

It is time, people, and elected officials, understand that charter schools are a vital part of the public school system. Charter schools promote competition and accountability in improving the neighborhood schools where

they are established.

Most importantly, charter schools provide a public-school option to parents who need a different choice in their child's education. After all, shouldn't education be about what is best for the children and ensuring they are the first priority, regardless of their choice in schools? What works for one child does not work for another child. Choice in education is necessary to meet the needs of all students, regardless of the ZIP code in which they reside.

Julie Collier
Mission Viejo
Executive director, Parents Advocate League.

THE DRUG WAR

Crack vs. powder cocaine

As a retired Drug Enforcement Administration agent, I take exception to UC Irvine Law School Dean Erwin Chemerinsky's argument that there is no appreciable difference between crack and powder cocaine ["Rationality in sentencing for cocaine," Opinion, May 21].

The reason for different sentencing is that crack is more insidious. The process by which crack is produced further refines cocaine, removing any impurities. When smoked, it produces a faster and more intense rush, which lasts a shorter amount of time and more rapidly produces addiction.

As for sentencing disparities, Chemerinsky could have framed his sentencing arguments better had he argued that crack producers and dealers are at the lower end of profits in the trafficking pyramid, as opposed to those who produce and traffic in mass quantities of cocaine hydrochloride. That is true. It would make more sense to attack sentencing guidelines on that basis, rather than on the racial breakdown.

The inner-city neighborhoods have traditionally produced crack, in contrast to

powder cocaine, which is generally produced in Latin America. Those who produce crack and sell it on the streets have been predominantly African American and, more recently,



REGISTER FILE PHOTO

Bags of methamphetamine, crack cocaine and heroin.

Hispanic. It also follows that the chief victims of crack have been African American or Hispanic. I would wager that there are a lot of folks in the black and Hispanic communities who applaud seeing crack producers and dealers put away, given the damage done to their families and communities.

Despite conspiracy theories, we who are in drug enforcement don't care about the violator's ethnicity. In my DEA career I arrested as many whites as any other ethnic group. In the end, Chemerinsky advocates for shorter sen-

tences as a way to put more offenders back on the streets to reduce our prison population and save money – without regard to the cost of having them on the street. As it is, California is releasing tens of thousands of violent criminals, including pedophiles, back into our communities as we speak. We hardly need any more.

At any rate, with all due respect, Chemerinsky doesn't know what he is talking about when he argues that there is no appreciable difference between crack and powder cocaine. If he wants to get a true picture of what crack has wrought in the inner city, he should go see a crack house for himself. It would be an education for him.

Gary Fouse
Lake Forest

THE BIGGER PICTURE

As usual, professor Chemerinsky misses the larger point: legalization of drugs. The resources being poured down the drain on incarceration and enforcement are a waste. Treat drugs like alcohol, with early education for minors. Then treat cocaine and other drugs the same as alcohol.

Thomas E. Schiff
Corona del Mar

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