



Outside the LAPD box

We have our hands full with local LAPD problems and there is not much time to think about the law enforcement problems across the nation, but every once in a while, it is good to escape the LAPD bubble and look at what is happening nationally to other law enforcement agencies. Consequently, I ended up attending the Law Enforcement Summit on Transparency and Accountability put on by JMS Associates. Other perspectives on our common problems were presented across two days of back-to-back speakers. It was interesting and, without necessarily espousing the views of the speakers, let me broaden your world as mine was broadened.

Matt Puckett, the executive director of the Florida Police Benevolent Association, who is a lobbyist for legislation on behalf of its 25,000 members, saw a flurry of legislation across the nation. They were caused by two inflection points: the Ferguson incident and the murders of five officers in Dallas. Ferguson caused legislation on law enforcement accountability and transparency, more diversity on hiring officers, de-escalation training, body cameras for all officers and civilian oversight of departments. Then the five officers were murdered. Another flurry of legislation swept the nation. This time it was a “back the blue” and “blue lives matter” support, the need for more officers and best practices for body cameras. Race relations are at the center of these debates. He advises for unions to get involved in politics.

NAPO will take that advice. Michael McHale, president of the National Association of Police Organizations with 241,000 sworn members, told of their efforts to get federal legislation. They have four priorities: increased protection for law enforcement officers, improving officers’ benefits, returning local law enforcement’s access to surplus military equipment and protecting officer’s social security benefits. On the first goal, NAPO is promoting three bills that will establish increased sentences for violence against police officers and a new law for an interstate flight from killing or attempting to kill a law enforcement officer. The second goal has almost been accomplished. A bill has been passed and sent to the president to sign that will improve the Public Safety Officers’ Benefits Improvement Act to give a presumptive benefit standard to officers’ death or disability and increasing the transparency of the status of claims. The third goal is an attempt to reverse the Obama directive that restricted law enforcement from access to surplus military equipment. Riot helmets, riot shields and armored personnel support vehicles are defensive equipment and save officers’ lives. Negotiations are ongoing with the Trump administration. Finally, the fourth goal is to repeal the Government Pension Offset and Windfall

Elimination Provisions that reduces officers' benefits under Social Security. Additionally, McHale met with Attorney General Sessions. Sessions wanted officers to know that there will be a shift in federal support for officers away from the political agenda of the previous administration. Sessions wants officers to know that "he has their backs."

"I promote 'right.' It doesn't have a color," said Archbishop Corey Wilson. He and Houston PD Officer Ray Hunt are actively involved in the "thumbs up" movement in Texas. It is a coalition between the Houston PD union and the association of black clergy that passes out "Pray 4 Police" bands and demands accountability as a two-way street between officers and the community. Supporters display a thumbs up when they see officers. The movement promotes cooperation between officers and the community. "Comply, then complain," Wilson tells his community members. Both officers and community members want to live to go home, he tells them. Officer Hunt, in return, keeps the community leaders up to date on the information concerning incendiary incidents that happen between Houston officers and the community. Facts need to replace false news. The system works. Houston has had no riots.

Sheriff Wayne Ivey of Brevard County, Florida, does it his way. After the San Bernardino terrorist attack, Sheriff Ivey put out a video advising the citizens in his district who were licensed to carry firearms to do so because evil people need to be confronted and they may be the only person at the scene who can immediately act. The video went viral on YouTube and has over 29 million hits. The liberal community, of course, immediately went nuts. Sheriff Ivey doesn't care.

He is a staunch believer in the use by law enforcement of all the media techniques of communication with the people in his district. It is the only way to bypass the negative mainstream media. He utilizes YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, local radio spots and paid advertisements in papers. Communication with the community is the key. He has 87,000 followers on Facebook. He maintains strong and frequent contacts with community leaders and gives them facts about incidents before the press can spin it out of control. All of this builds up trust between his officers and the community. He holds a weekly show where he puts the top 10 fugitives on a wheel and spins it to see who will be the focus of law enforcement for the week. The program is extremely popular, and about 80 percent of the "winning" fugitives are caught. He promotes parental responsibility by hosting a website entitled itstimetobeaparentagain.com. It promotes parenting and spells out what is legally permitted and what is not. He believes social media is a valuable tool.

On the flip side, there was Natalie Kato of the ACLU. She explained that the ACLU is not anti-police. The ACLU wants the scary people in jail too. There is just a big difference in who is scary and who is not. The ACLU priorities are sentencing reform, increasing diversion programs, bail reform and reducing corrections and criminal justice spending and reinvesting in strategies to decrease crime and strengthen neighborhoods. She wants data and open dialogue with law enforcement leaders to ensure that good policy that promotes public safety while protecting individual rights is formed.

Dr. Lorenzo Boyd, Chair of the Criminal Justice Department at the University of Maryland, spoke on race, diversity and police legitimacy. He said that it is not black crime, it is poor people crime. Stereotypes destroy trust. What do people want? "Respect is the currency of the street," he

says. The community wants to be treated with respect. Police must convince the community that they have the legitimate authority to tell them what to do. This means acting fairly with justice. The police accept responsibility for too many things, thereby handicapping themselves. Mental health problems should be handled by mental health facilities, economic problems should be handled by elected government officials, etc. The politicians and organizations responsible for these problems should be forced to handle them, not dump them on police officers.

Attorney Benjamin Crump represented Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown, two of the most publicized cases criticizing law enforcement in this decade. I asked him about something that has always puzzled me. "How does law enforcement get blamed for the shooting of Trayvon Martin when it was a non-law enforcement citizen who was the shooter, not a cop?" His answer was that the shooter was not arrested by law enforcement after the shooting as, the community believed, the shooter would have been if he were black. Crump believes that if there is personal contact between officers and members of the community, they would get to know each other, and the perceived threat level would drop. "Ignorance is dangerous to all of us," he says.

Ron DeLord has been representing unions for over 40 years. He has so much to say he wrote a book. "Law Enforcement Police Unions, and the Future" is recommended reading. Republicans in power, he thinks, is a mixed blessing. Republicans will buy you equipment, but don't think you need a pension. Democrats think you need a pension, but second-guess every use of force decision you make. Ron wonders if police organizations have the financial strength to deal with crises after crises. He does not see that there will be any significant reductions in poverty, homelessness, mental illness or unemployment in the next 10 to 15 years. Also, the media, politicians and community activists will never be satisfied. All drains on law enforcement. The good news? Wages will rise because recruits cannot be attracted at current wages. Police are respected in most communities. Union memberships are secure if only for legal protection. Management and labor will embrace reforms and force politicians to put up funds for training.

My thanks to Jim Spearing of JMS Associates for putting this training together. Now, back to our problems....

Be legally careful out there.

Links to various things in this article are at www.warningbells.com.