



OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY  
COUNTY OF TULARE

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Seventy-seven years ago, a Milwaukee judge discovered a note on his front porch. The note stated a bomb was inside the local Sears store and demanded a \$100,000 payment to ensure it would not be activated.

The judge immediately contacted the police and it turns out the note was intended for a previous occupant of the house, who had been a manager at the Sears store. A day later a small bomb did go off in a Sears store causing minimal damage. The extortion notes continued, if the money was not delivered, there would be a bigger bomb next time.

Currently, in San Salvador, El Salvador on the 15th day of each month a toll, a ransom, a payment is delivered by local bus drivers to the Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) gang members to ensure “safe” travel throughout the countryside.

According to *The Economist* (May 21, 2016), this type of extortion is an unavoidable fact of life in El Salvador. Citizens pay \$756 million dollars a year, nearly three percent of their gross national product to gang members.

Recently, the Sacramento City Council, in a unanimous vote, adopted a three-year, \$1.5 million dollar contract with a mentoring program that will target the 50 most violent men in their city in an effort to persuade them to cease committing violent crimes.

Through “one on one cognitive behavioral therapy, life coaching, and a stipend of \$1,000 dollars a month” for these dangerous gang members, they believe they can reduce the murder rate for their city.

Headlines have distilled this down to “paying people not to commit murder.” Clearly, that is a provocative statement, but the premise of identifying 50 of the most violent gang members and then paying them money and coaching them to behave in a law-abiding manner makes a strong argument that this simply a hopeful form of extortion.

What message does Sacramento convey to the victims of these 50 violent gang members? Where is their life coaching opportunities, their paycheck for staying in school?

And make no mistake about it, there are victims. These predators do not exist in a bubble; they have hurt and damaged real people in their wake of crime. Have these gang members paid restitution to these victims prior to entering into this program?

California voters are getting very comfortable with rooting for the criminal element. From AB 109 realignment to Propositions 36, 47, and 57, voters have consistently demonstrated that our resources, our attention, and hope for rehabilitation, outweighs victims of crime and future victims of crime.

How long will we accept the tyranny of crime before we take off our blinders and go back to the important business of protecting our State's children, elderly, and every law-abiding person who is simply trying to go to work, pay bills, attend school, and live their lives crime-free?

The program, Advance Peace, uses "reformed felons" as mentors. These mentors will not cooperate with the police if a participant is involved in a crime, as it would hurt the trust they are attempting to build with a violent gang member.

How in the world can there be an advocacy for changing behavior if the mentors themselves do not trust the police? Stipends are dispersed for reaching "milestones such as beating substance abuse, getting a high school diploma or improving parenting skills."

One can only imagine who makes this assessment, who determines what is an improvement in parenting, what constitutes beating drug abuse...and note it does not discourage use of drugs, just abuse.

What will be the tipping point for California? The law-abiding people are paying the ransom in situations like Sacramento, hoping that their children are not harmed, their identity is not pilfered, their houses are not burglarized, and their cars are not stolen.

Meanwhile voters are passing legislation to reduce sentences and reclassify crimes in a never-ending attempt to change criminal behavior by codling it.

If this is the world according to California, where we pay people not to commit crimes, can we put at the top of the list paying all people (not just 50) not to molest children, perhaps pay all people not to beat and ravage their partners?

Sacramento is correct about one thing; identifying the 50 most violent gang members of their city. Instead of handing criminals money and life coaching, how about putting them in jail the next time they commit a crime? What if we focused on consequences as opposed to second, third, and fourth chances?

Let's stop taking chances with victims; they deserve more from all of us.

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