

THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



586 Reimagining the Future For Guam's Police

I've been talking and writing recently about reimagining government and business. I've also been reading about the recent calls to reform police operations, following the George Floyd murder and riots. I'm Jerry Roberts and today, how those two issues come together, next on The Extra Point.

American cities burn, stores are looted, and police reform activists want change. At the same time I'm talking about reimagining government, which should include law enforcement. Can we connect these ideas?

Several years ago a half-dozen cities took part in a program to reform police departments. It followed other deaths of Black Americans at the hands of police officers. Training included racial biases, de-escalating tense situations, new standards for the use of force, and early-warning systems to identify officers who presented a greater risk of violence. One of those cities was Minneapolis.

Now, there are new questions coming forward. Is the answer to reform simply changing or improving how we do our policing, or is it that we should do less "policing"? When you mention less policing, a lot of people scream that we don't have enough cops as it is — and I've been one of them.

People don't feel as safe as they once did, and we know there are fewer police officers on our streets as in years past. Still, is that going to solve our problems?

Alex Vitale, a sociology professor at Brooklyn College and the author of *The End of Policing*, sees a different solution. He says better training and more equipment for police isn't the answer. Instead, we should look to reduce their responsibilities. He wants to reduce police budgets and use that money elsewhere.

Vitale believes that politicians must develop

non-police solutions to our society's problems. We've waged a war on drugs for decades through the facilities of the criminal justice system, spending billions of dollars on it — and we lost. They lost it back in the mainland and we lost it here in Guam. Do we keep going in the same direction? At some point don't you have to say the approach is wrong?

There's no doubt we must protect our community with an adequate response against violence and crime. However, we also must take steps to cure the real problems, not just treat the symptoms. Or we'll never come out ahead.

Drug use and alcoholism are symptoms. So are troubles attributed to domestic violence, bullying, homelessness, and more. People don't exit the womb with those issues. They grow into them and you don't cure any of that with a badge.

We don't need fewer police officers in Guam. What we need is to ramp up the creation of new jobs with highly specialized people to work with individuals and families and to provide a better level of support. Police officers shouldn't have to respond to everything.

We need to start teaching coping skills in the elementary years, and we don't stop until the kid graduates high school. Financial skills, social skills, how a business works, and there are people a lot smarter than me who can add to the list. If we have to feed kids Common Core, let's also make sure we add to the menu common sense, values, life skills, health and nutrition.

Let's graduate kids who have the ability to conduct their lives in a safe, sane, and sensible way. Then, maybe they won't feel the need to turn to something in a bottle or a pipe to help them escape reality.

(Con't.)



You don't stop substance abuse with threats of fines and being behind bars. You stop it when people just don't want it.

This isn't about policing and crime. It's about simple economics. The problem goes away when the market for it dries up.

We need to greatly increase spending for mental health. It's a massive need and we need to treat it like that.

I like to put a business twist on the things we talk about. What's this got to do with business? If we don't get a handle on these issues, then the quality of future job applicants coming to apply to work with you isn't going to get better. Further, the baggage employees drag in the door with them on a daily basis isn't likely to change, so engagement and production won't improve, either.

Vitale says it has to begin with politicians because they control the purse strings. That said, once they put the money up they need to step aside and avoid politicizing these changes. I believe they should create a government reform board with the majority of members coming from the private sector.

I would like to think that this governor is the one who will push to change the face of government. Can Lou Leon Guerrero and the next 15 senators reimagine GovGuam? Can they reimagine policing? Can they visualize growing stronger kids who can better handle what life throws at them?

If we would create these changes now, we could see incremental progress in the short term, and major progress in less than 10 years. Does that sound like a long time? 10 years is nothing. We've still got the same problems in this community as we did when I came here, nearly 50 years ago.

It takes a special kind of person to plant a tree, knowing he/she may not be around to enjoy the fruit and shade that tree will provide. They do it because it will bring value to people in the future.

We need leaders who will step up and make those kinds of changes, and we need them now.

That's The Extra Point. Be responsible and make something good happen today. For 93.3 and the Ray Gibson Show, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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