

# SUBJECT TO DEBATE

A NEWSLETTER OF THE POLICE EXECUTIVE RESEARCH FORUM



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Build Local Partnerships and  
Change Students' Lives** PAGE 3

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## Chiefs at PERF Town Hall Meeting Swap Stories and Tips About Budget Cuts

THE ECONOMIC CRISIS CONTINUED TO BE THE MOST pressing issue on police chiefs' agenda as they met in San Diego for PERF's Town Hall Meeting on November 9. All across the country, chiefs and sheriffs report that they are being asked to prepare budget cuts, which in many cases will result in layoffs of officers. If the economy continues to falter over the next year, they say, the cuts in policing will only get worse in the following year.

However, a number of veteran chiefs noted that they have been through previous recessions, and they offered tips about how to get through economic bad times. Several chiefs said that one common budget-cutting tactic is to require burglar alarm companies to verify alarms before

police are asked to respond. As Fremont, Calif. Chief Craig Steckler said in a message to residents on his department Website, "No alarm company has ever approached law enforcement and asked if it was all right to enter into a private contract with a customer—and then use a public agency to *service* the contract."

But not all chiefs have found alarm verification to be a good way to save money.

The next issue of *Subject to Debate* will include coverage of other issues discussed at the Town Hall Meeting, including crime rates, immigration, and the change in Presidential Administrations. See pages 4 and 5 of this issue for comments that were made about the economy.

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## Two More Issues for President Obama, With Implications for Justice and Race

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA IS GOING TO HAVE A lot on his plate when he takes the oath of office on January 20—the economy, Iraq, Afghanistan, terrorism, and health care reform, just for starters.

I'd like to talk about two more issues that I hope will receive serious consideration in an Obama Administration: disenfranchisement of felons, and sentencing disparities for crack and powder cocaine.

Of course I realize that these will not be at the top of the President's to-do list. But I believe they deserve serious attention, because they are important. On both issues, I believe the status quo tends to undermine the criminal justice system and deepen racial divisions in the United States.

Voting is a right that is provided by the U.S. Constitution, but at the moment, an estimated 5.3 million Americans have lost that right, either permanently or temporarily, because of a felony conviction. The laws vary by state. Nearly all states—all except Maine and Vermont—prohibit voting by offenders who are currently incarcerated for a felony offense. Thirty-five states bar felons from voting while they are on parole. Two states deny the right to vote to all offenders, even those who have completed their sentences.

Some of my friends and colleagues may have different views, but my opinion is that, while there is no way that people should be voting while they are in prison, once you get out, you should be restored to full citizenship as much as possible.

It's not that I'm some kind of bleeding-heart liberal; I just sincerely believe that this is the right thing to do. I don't think we should give criminals an excuse for not reforming themselves because they are bitter about having had one of their most important rights—the right to vote—taken away. I think it is better to remove any obstacles that stand in the way of offenders resuming a full, healthy, productive life. Some say offenders on parole should not be allowed to vote, because the term of parole is part of their sentence. But my sense is, once you've cleared the four walls of the jail, your right to vote should be restored.

Aside from the question of promoting rehabilitation by encouraging released criminal offenders to think of themselves as full citizens with all the rights of citizens, there is a racial aspect to the disenfranchisement of felons. Thirteen percent of African-American men—1.4 million in total—are disenfranchised. That rate is seven times the national average.

The second issue—cocaine sentencing—is similar. I believe that this issue undermines trust in the criminal justice system, and it has strong racial effects that are unhealthy to our society. For anyone who is not familiar with this issue, the problem is that federal sentencing laws governing convictions for crack cocaine are much, much stiffer than sentences for powder cocaine. The federal Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 created a mandatory five-year prison term for offenses involving 5 grams of crack. An offender must have 100 times as much powder cocaine to trigger the same five-year sentence.

The U.S. Sentencing Commission, a panel that Congress created in 1984 to write sentencing guidelines for federal judges, with

the specific goal of making sentences fairer and more uniform, for many years has urged Congress to amend the cocaine laws to reduce that 100-to-1 disparity. And last year, the Sentencing Commission took some limited action to decrease the sentencing guidelines for crack cocaine offenses, and made those changes retroactive.

So prisoners convicted of crack crimes across the nation have been getting some relief. But the Sentencing Commission noted that it had only limited authority to take a partial step on this issue, and said that only Congress can address the mandatory penalties that still apply.

Bear in mind that this Sentencing Commission, like me, is not a bunch of bleeding-heart liberals. The members are mostly federal judges, law school professors, and partners at leading law firms. It was President Ronald Reagan who signed the law creating the Commission. But this panel has consistently found that the disparity in sentencing for crack and powder cocaine is not justified.

The disparity came about in the 1980s, when the nation was frightened by the crack cocaine epidemic, and was told that crack is a lot more deadly than powder cocaine and that it caused users to become violent. But the Sentencing Commission, as well as a lot of other experts, have discounted those claims. I believe it's harmful to have this severe disparate impact in sentencing based on an artificial distinction about the particular form of the same drug. It's not the right thing to be doing. It creates mistrust in the justice system.

And again, this issue has a strong racial impact. While fewer than half of crack cocaine *users* are black, 82 percent of crack cocaine *defendants* in 2006 were African-American, according to the Sentencing Commission. Only 27 percent of powder cocaine defendants were African-American. The result is that African-Americans end up serving longer prison terms in federal prison for drug offenses—about the same as whites serve for violent crimes. That is not fair. And while the sentencing laws may have been written back in the 1980s based on a misunderstanding about crack being more dangerous, in my view, the longer these disparities are allowed to remain in effect after that misunderstanding has been cleared up, the more it creates a perception of intentional racism in the justice system.

If a rich white guy gets drunk on whiskey and causes a motor vehicle accident, chances are he'll be charged with the same crime as a poor white guy or an African-American guy who does the same thing. It's time to bring that same concept to our sentencing for drug crimes.

And it's time to scale back the disenfranchisement of criminals who have been released from prison, and whom we are trying to encourage to put their lives on the straight and narrow track.



Chief John F. Timoney, PERF President

# Newport News Youth Leadership Camps Build Local Partnerships and Change Students' Lives

BY SERGEANT PETER F. EDGETTE

LOCAL POLICE AGENCIES ARE WORKING HARDER than ever to establish local partnerships that discourage students from joining gangs, committing violent crimes, and making other decisions they will regret the rest of their lives; and the Newport News Police Department (NNPD) is taking a leadership role when it comes to the development of proactive youth programs. We are committed to the development of innovative strategies that will positively impact the youths of our community.

The Newport News Police Department sponsors several youth activities and programs. We offer a Citizen Police Academy for Youth, which gives teenagers an inside look at the Police Department, teaching them about police operations and legal concepts such as search and seizure, while also providing an opportunity to interact with officers in a productive way. Our Chief of Police, James D. Fox, sponsors a Police Youth Advisory Board that meets monthly to discuss various issues affecting the lives of the children in our city.

The NNPD empowers officers to apply the problem-solving model of policing to their daily activities, and Chief Fox continuously reminds officers that we are all leaders in the community. Over the past few years, several members of our Department have met that challenge and put together one of the most successful youth programs this city and perhaps the Commonwealth of Virginia have ever seen: the Newport News Police Department Youth Leadership Camps.

The program was spearheaded in 2005 by Sgt. Eric Mansfield, the supervisor of our School Resource Officer Unit (SROU). Sergeant Mansfield envisioned a program that would help teach students the skills needed to avoid violence, to develop positive role models in their lives, and to make responsible personal decisions. He recognized that teachers, counselors, and even parents are involved in a relatively small portion of a child's daily life. The hours

that students are exposed to negative influences and peer pressures are often far more influential than the few hours of positive influences they receive. The Youth Leadership Camps are designed to rebalance the scales in our favor, and infuse an entire week of positive influences into these young people's lives.

In the summer of 2006 we held our first youth camp—a complete immersion program that began on Monday morning and ended on Friday afternoon with an impressive graduation ceremony. The camp gave 30 students between the ages of 13 and 17 the opportunity to exercise, work, study, play, eat, sleep, live, and learn from police officers for an entire week. This camps provide an unprecedented opportunity for us to share information about our department and the law enforcement profession, and to encourage personal discovery and growth.

In order to accomplish such a major endeavor, we needed more than just the funding and participants. After all, we are a police department with over 500 employees, but to clothe, feed, house, and educate 30 young men and women for an entire week is no small feat. So we partnered with two of our strongest local allies.

Our first partner was the local Boys and Girls Club, which provided its expertise and knowledge of the local youth community. They identified potential campers and solicited participation by students who would benefit most from the camp. They also provided equipment, transport vehicles, and staff members who were willing to serve as chaperons, teachers and mentors. Steven S. Kast, the Chief Executive Officer of the Boys and Girls Clubs of the Virginia Peninsula, stated, "This camp offered our young members the opportunity to enhance their social skills, build relationships with officers, and add structure to their lives. The partnership with the Newport News Police Department gave youths the knowledge and the power to resist being involved in negative activities that could lead to gang involvement."

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**Above: Students in an exercise at the youth camp. Sergeants Peter Edgette (left) and Eric Mansfield of the Newport News Police Department.**

## Commissioner Charles Ramsey Joins PERF Board of Directors

The PERF Board of Directors has chosen Philadelphia Police Commissioner Charles H. Ramsey to fill the remaining term of Detroit Police Chief Ella Bully-Cummings, who retired in September.

### **PORTLAND, ORE. CHIEF ROSANNE SIZER: We've Already Thinned the Soup**



We're being asked to prepare a budget for next year with 2.5-percent and 5-percent cut packages, which are probably doable, even though we've already had six years of budget cutting since the turn of the century. We had a couple of good years [since 2000], but didn't really recover much ground in those good years. So we're facing significant organizational restructuring, because we've already been thinning the soup, and now we have no economies of scale. We're looking at possibly closing precincts, maybe taking a run at [eliminating] our horse patrol unit. [Other agencies are also being cut substantially.] In the last few years we've lost about a third of the jail beds in the county, and our mental health system is nearly collapsing. Our situation is fairly bleak. I think there will be some effort to have the budget affect the police less than other systems, but we're still looking at significant cuts.

### **NAPERVILLE, ILL. CHIEF DAVID E. DIAL: The Bottom Fell Out of Our Budget**



Naperville is a city of 145,000 people, known for a great quality of life, a nice vibrant downtown, great schools, great parks, and a low crime rate. We've been having lean budgets for the last two or three years, and all of a sudden, this year the bottom fell out of the budget. We are funded heavily through real estate transfer taxes and sales taxes. The real estate taxes come from houses that are being sold, and our housing market has stalled. That created a huge deficit this year, and double-huge next year. As for the sales taxes, we have a lot of car dealerships in Naperville, and we rely heavily on those dealerships for sales taxes. But now we are at a 15-year low for automobile purchases in our community. So it's impacted us very much, including the Police Department.

[Regarding the fact that police departments often are among the last government agencies to suffer budget cuts]: That may be so, but I represent about a third of a \$100-million-plus budget, and there's no way the other departments can cope with these cuts without cutting the police and fire departments. The council has taken a position that they will not raise taxes, and the only way to do it is to cut people. Like all police department budgets, ours is very heavily oriented toward personnel, about 86 percent [of our budget]. We slashed every non-personnel account in that budget; there is nothing left but people.

[Asked by Chuck Wexler whether he has told his community about the effects of budget cuts]: We have made it very

clear to the public, and we had an interesting reaction from the city council. They're the ones who dictated that the city cut the positions, but they don't like hearing about it. I was interviewed on CNN about it, and they didn't like that. But they haven't changed their position.

[Asked what will happen if he doesn't make the cuts that the city council has ordered]: I think there will be another cut then! [laughter]

### **FREMONT, CALIF. CHIEF CRAIG STECKLER: I've Been Through Previous Economic Downturns**



I've been a police chief for 28 years, and this is not my first budget cycle downturn. We had Proposition 13 in California [a 1978 ballot initiative that capped property taxes]; in 1992 we had a recession; and in 2002 we had what we call the "Tech Wreck" in California when the Silicon Valley and stock market dropped out from under us. In 1992 I laid off 29 police officers—not vacant positions, I laid off 29 cops. And in 2002–03 I laid off 24. Our department polices a community of 212,000, covering 92 square miles, with 188 sworn officers. So you've got to get creative about what you do.

We've done things like going to online reporting of misdemeanors like petty theft and vandalism. But where we've had the most trouble is with verified response [of burglar alarms]. [After requiring that alarms be verified by the alarm company before an officer will be dispatched, except when residents use a "panic" feature to signal that they are being robbed in their homes or are otherwise in duress], our alarm calls went from about 10,000 a year to 600. I took quite a beating for [the new policy], and I'm still taking a beating on it. [Some city council candidates have criticized the policy.]

You can get by and make budget cuts, but it is very tough. We held community meetings and did outreach, told them what we were doing and why we had to do it. Unfortunately, the first thing that goes out the window is the quality-of-life enforcement, and we know how important that is in fighting crime; so my street robberies went up.

But I do not cut the training budget and I don't cut conferences. Training is absolutely critical. It's usually the first thing that gets cut, and then your whole organization suffers.

[At this point Chuck Wexler asked all the police executives in the room whether unions in their jurisdiction are ever willing to make concessions on their pay and benefits in order to avoid layoffs, and there was agreement that unions rarely make such concessions.]

*Chief Steckler:* We work collaboratively with the Police Officers Association. You want them on board with you. They have an official line that "our job is to protect what we've got. Your job as chief is to get [funding to hire more people], and if you can't,

that's your problem." But we sat down with them and pulled the books out, and said, "If you want to hire your own independent auditor and audit the books, be my guest. Look around. Your neighbors are losing their jobs, their houses are being foreclosed on, and if you don't think this [economic crisis] is real, just talk to your neighbors." And they got it, they understood.

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**SAN DIEGO CHIEF BILL LANSDOWNE:**  
**Chiefs Should Always Watch  
Their Budgets Closely**



There are a lot of battle-scarred veterans in this room; we've seen downturns before. I don't think there's a year that's gone by that we haven't cut down [to some degree]. And it seems like every year as it gets close to contract negotiation time, it's "We're poor, we're out of money." But there's a difference in this one. It's a real shortfall that's happening across the country. For us in San Diego, the shortfall is about \$43 million.

[In previous jobs as chief], what I've always done—and what we've all done forever—is when the officials come and ask us for cuts, we offer to give up the helicopter, the boats, all the K-9s, take away all the take-home cars, get rid of the horses. And of course those are [popular programs], and it's never going to fly. They know it, I know it, but that's what we throw up there.

But now I have a strong mayor who's a former police chief himself, so he says BS and it doesn't work! [laughter]

I've seen these budget battles so many times. So I know that while we do a lot of things—we fight crime, we manage people—it all requires money, and the budget is what makes it go. So you've got to be real careful with that. Every single day I watch the budget, and I find someone who's really good in watching the budget. We were able to predict the current shortfall, and I've been holding vacancies in the department.

So when we went through it this time, Mayor [Jerry] Sanders didn't say, "Give me 10 percent." He said, "We have a \$43-million shortfall, and I expect all the department heads to come back and give me what you can do without overwhelming the system and cutting back services so much that they hurt the ability of the city to operate on a daily basis." For me, with our budget of about \$410 million, I cut \$10 million out of it by holding back some vacancies, and instead of hiring 50 officers every quarter, now I hire 23 officers every quarter. That'll keep me at my current staffing level. It doesn't let me grow the way I'd like, but it keeps me balanced. And I can "sell" that, not only to the mayor, but also to the public and to my officers.

We do have some officers in difficult financial straits, so we worked with the nonprofits here in the city and some corporations and they have a fund that they put together that is helping officers stay in their homes.

I'm estimating that next year there will be a \$64-million shortfall for the city, and that cut will be a little more difficult

for me to manage. But I'm preparing today for what I think might happen next year.

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**DALLAS CHIEF DAVID KUNKLE:**  
**Verified Response of Alarms  
Can Be a Headache**



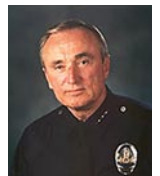
Verified response works very well for us, but I would not recommend that everyone do it, because you never win with verified response. Every spike in crime, any poor response on any type of call, is blamed on verified response. The alarm industry is a lot more efficient than we are in getting their message out; they pander to people's fears.

Our real estate prices went up gradually over the last 10 years, so we didn't see the extreme increases that other parts of the country did. So now our real estate prices are holding very well. I think we are going to be affected by the economic downturn, but less so than other parts of the country.

While 85 percent of our budget is personnel, the rest of it directly supports your people. So in a shrinking budget I would cut people, especially through attrition, before decimating the equipment, training, and everything else you need to support your sworn personnel. There's also a tendency to cut civilians first, but every time we cut a civilian, we've got to replace that position with a sworn officer.

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**LOS ANGELES CHIEF WILLIAM BRATTON:**  
**I'm Fortunate to Be Avoiding Big Cuts**



I've been a chief now for about 22 years in four different departments, and I think probably only in about three years out of those 22 have I had a good budget. In 1980, when I was at the Boston Police Department, we laid off 25 percent of the department, closed our Police Academy, closed half of our police stations, and I used to go to community meetings with three or four thousand people and try to explain to them why it was going to be a benefit to close their police station—and do it with a straight face. We had nightly demonstrations for over two months. So I've been through about the worst you can imagine.

In Los Angeles, ironically, 2008 and 2009 will be the best years this department has ever had, in the midst of some of the worst financial crises the city has ever had. We're in good shape because of the mayor. Crime is down for six straight years, and gang crime is down almost 60 percent, so he's riding that horse. This year we will experience some cutbacks, but at the same time we'll be opening a half-dozen brand new facilities next year. We just purchased 10,000 new portable radios, and are purchasing 1,200 Tasers. There's an irony, in the worst recession or depression Los Angeles has had, we're doing OK—for the time being, anyway.



The other critical partner in this project is the U.S. Army at Fort Eustis, which provided the facilities where the campers sleep, eat, train and learn, as well as enormous amounts of logistical and other support. Barracks on the Fort Eustis Army Installation became the home of the students attending the camp. This was the first time many of these students had ever been on an active military base, much less slept in an army barracks, eaten in a mess hall with soldiers, trained on army obstacle courses, and participated in many other activities. Fort Eustis recognizes the importance of community partnerships that serve to improve the lives of our children. According to Lt. Col. Beverly Cornelius, the Provost Marshal at Fort Eustis, "Collaborative partnerships establish common goals. This camp provided many goals, one of which is to enhance our children's future. It is a wonderful program."

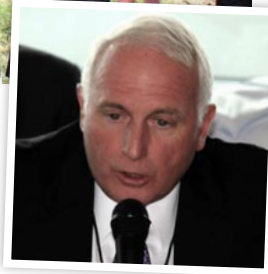
The cooperation, dedication and hard work by everyone involved in making the camps a reality were nothing short of remarkable. As noted by Chief Fox, "This is a great opportunity for our kids to partner with the police, the military, and the Boys and Girls Club to develop their character and self-esteem. Just think what we could accomplish in gang prevention and developing young leadership if this program could be done on a statewide and nationwide level."

Over the course of the week, the students are exposed to leadership training, discipline, exercise, and education; but they also have a great deal of fun. They participate in drill formations, have their barracks inspected, participate in team-building exercises, play games, ride go-karts, visit local theme parks, participate in boating safety courses, exercise as a team, and run obstacle courses. They also participate in classroom activities that teach them about the dangers of joining gangs and associating with the wrong crowd, and about the impact that their decisions have on the rest of their lives. The relationships that are developed among the students and between the students and the instructors are impressive. Furthermore, many of the children are challenged like never before, and they learn a great deal about their ability to adapt, overcome and ultimately succeed. Jessica Pineda, who received the Best Camper Award in 2006, said, "For me it was the best thing ever. I would be really happy to be there next year. I will never forget the things we did."

Sergeant Mansfield put it all in perspective after the first graduation ceremony when he said, "Seeing the smiles on their faces at the graduation ceremony, and knowing that many of them had never been this happy or proud, was assurance enough that we were doing the right thing." And we have been inundated with requests from all over the region from parents, teachers, counselors, siblings, and students who have heard about our camps and want to attend.



**Above: Students in an exercise at the youth camp. Right: Chief James Fox of the Newport News PD.**



The Newport News Police Department is not the type of agency to declare victory at the first hint of success; so we built upon the success of the first camp by making the program better. If a camp that has a positive impact on 30 students is good, then two camps that help 60 students are even better. So in 2007 we took this program to the next level by instituting an advanced youth leadership camp as well as a basic camp. We also have advanced camp graduates coming back and serving as camp counselors for students attending the basic camp. Observing some of these children make the transformation from potentially high-risk student to leader and mentor for their peers is quite remarkable.

The Newport News Police Department spends a great deal of time and energy focused on short- and long-term goals. Everything we do is geared towards a specific objective or group of objectives in our Strategic Management Plan (SMP). Each officer is well versed in our top five goals and objectives, and officers and support staff members are constantly reminded to focus on our strategic plan.

In addition to everything else our Youth Leadership Camps accomplish, they address some of our most important goals.

For instance, our primary goal as a police agency is to reduce crime and the fear of crime in Newport News. Educating children about the dangers of gangs and teaching them self-discipline and good judgment obviously have a significant influence on crime. Another one of our goals is to recruit, retain and develop a highly capable workforce. There is perhaps no better recruiting platform than our Youth Leadership Camps. The students who attended these camps are exposed to excellent role models—caring police officers, Boys and Girls Club counselors, and U. S. Army soldiers.

Some of the students receive a greater positive influence during the one week of camp than they do all year long from other sources. Several have already expressed an interest in pursuing careers in either the military or law enforcement.

Another of our top five goals is to partner with the community to resolve neighborhood concerns and improve the quality of life in Newport News. As Chief Fox noted, there are few partnerships that involve such critical elements of society as educational institutions, local Boys and Girls Clubs, the Armed Forces, and local police officers.

Programs such as the Youth Leadership Camps in Newport News should make every law enforcement officer proud. The camps will undoubtedly have a long-term positive impact on these children's lives, as well as on the officers' and counselors' lives and on the entire community.



Sgt. Peter F. Edgette is supervisor of the Newport News Police Department's Forensic Services Unit.

# Plan to Attend PERF's Annual Meeting

## WHEN:

March 26–28, 2009

## WHERE:

Ritz-Carlton Washington Hotel  
Washington, D.C.

Mention PERF to obtain special meeting rate of \$225 when you call 800-421-3333. Online registration for the meeting and the hotel available at [www.policeforum.org](http://www.policeforum.org).

Agenda topics will include a number of issues, including:

- The effects of the economic downturn on police department budgets
- How to “do more with less” in a tight economy
- Finding new sources of revenue
- Does a bad economy change crime patterns?
- Advice from veteran chiefs who have cut budgets in previous recessions
- Immigration reform



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**Chiefs at PERF Town Hall Meeting  
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