



OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY
COUNTY OF TULARE

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Former President Bill Clinton announced that his administration “overdid it” with the passage of the 1994 crime bill. He opined it put too many non-violent offenders in custody for too long a period of time. California Governor Jerry Brown followed suit and stated the bill he championed 40 years ago also sent too many offenders to prison without offering rehabilitation. Ironically during National Crime Victims Week, Governor Brown stated that the bill he signed into law in 1977 that dictated prison sentences left little room for incentives to change and improve inmate’s behavior.

These reversals of philosophy are on my mind as I write this article. At some point didn’t we all care about reducing crime? No matter our political affiliation, none of us wanted our homes burglarized, our property stolen, our loved ones harmed. There will probably always be room to debate whether incarceration should be viewed as punishment, or as the Governor suggests, an opportunity to rehabilitate. However, this endless focus on what is the best path for the criminal after he or she commits a crime is becoming absurd.

With that in mind, and in honor of April being the month we recognize crime victims nationally and here locally with our annual Quilt Ceremony, I want to bring the focus back to themes that appear to be lost in our national dialog: justice, victims, and answers.

The concerns with former President Clinton and Governor Brown lie with the incarcerated prisoner, serving too much time for his or her crime. As insulting as that concept can be to their victims, at least those victims have answers. For crime victims, or in the case of murder, families and friends of the victim, unsolved cases represent another layer of frustration, disappointment, and abandonment.

Reporters often ask family members at the conclusion of a murder trial if they have “closure”. Justice does not necessarily deliver closure, but it does bring a resolution, which is often the beginning step of a long and painful healing process. Families and friends of unsolved homicide victims have not experienced even that first step towards justice. There is no solace, there is nothing even close to closure, and there is certainly not justice.

According to the Department of Justice, Tulare County’s unsolved homicide rate is between 30-49%. We need to bring answers and justice for these victims and their families. Some of our municipal law enforcement agencies are battling back from the

economic down turn, they are facing recruiting challenges, and they are stretched thin. In order to better support our local law enforcement's detectives, I have formed our first Cold Case Homicide Unit.

Our partner in this endeavor is the Tulare Police Department. Police Chief Wes Hensley stated, "The overarching goal of every law enforcement official is to ensure that the victims of crime and their families receive justice. Partnering with the District Attorney's office to investigate cold homicide cases provides an opportunity to pool our resources in furtherance of our goal to provide that justice to the victims of society's most devastating crime."

Our future goal is to possibly have a County-wide Cold Case Task Force, where we can better serve every community in our entire County.

As we build this task force, we wage war against apathy, against time, and against fading memories. Every victim of an unsolved murder deserves to have today's technology applied to the evidence. It has been said that a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. Our journey is beginning with one criminal investigator and one deputy district attorney. Our destination is the courtroom, where the once forgotten will be remembered, where answers will be delivered, and where justice will finally be served.

Tim Ward
Tulare County District Attorney