



OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY
COUNTY OF TULARE

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Driving in our Valley, one cannot miss seeing a “My Job Depends on Ag” sticker on a vehicle or in a business window. Since our County is the leading agriculture producer in California, this grassroots acknowledgement makes perfect sense and a case can be made that most of our jobs trace back to a partnership with agriculture.

At the District Attorney’s Office, our jobs depend on law enforcement. The cases we prosecute are generated from the good police work done by all of our local agencies, along with CHP, Fish and Wildlife, Cal Fire and other State agencies.

As prosecutors, we not only rely on law enforcement as a partner in the criminal justice system, these are same men and women who keep our communities safe, patrol our roadways, and hold fast the thin blue line. So, like all of you, I have a vested interest in the efforts of law enforcement to recruit new police officers and deputies.

Unfortunately, many departments are seeing a dramatic drop in people interested in becoming police officers. Los Angeles, New York, and Chicago police departments report that it has become difficult to recruit viable candidates. Ten years ago, Seattle Police Department reported 3,000 applicants for every 10 openings; today they estimate they have 1,000 applicants for 70 openings. The toughest hit are the smaller agencies, which have always had to compete with the benefits a larger force can provide. Varied career opportunities and greater pay draw more recruits out of an increasingly smaller applicant pool.

Porterville Police Chief Eric Kroutil stated that, in the past, running a “we are hiring” advertisement in a few publications was all it took to draw applicants. Although he has become more proactive with recruiting, he brings up an excellent point when he says that the best form of recruitment is his officers performing their duties in a positive and professional manner.

Why aren’t young people choosing a career in law enforcement? Some studies point to desirability of working in “dot.com” world, with untraditional work spaces, great salaries and free cereal (seriously). Other factors may be the media attention on controversial police conduct and the inevitable violent protests which follow.

But I firmly believe the reasons women and men were called to protect and to serve has not changed. That burning desire to make a difference in one's community cannot be extinguished by scrutiny, criticism and (perceived) lack of support.

Recently I had the opportunity to tour the Reagan Museum. As I drove through Simi Valley, I noticed that the lampposts displayed blue banners that declared Simi Valley's gratitude and support for their police officers. It was a beautiful visible pageant of the community's support. I wondered if a police officer, weary on a night shift, looked up at those banners and for a moment, remembered the community stood behind him or her.

For those of you currently holding that blue line, even if your community is silent, we support you. For those of you thinking about entering this honorable line of work, listen less to the loudest voices of dissent. Listen to the quieter voice of appreciation. Appreciation, sadly, never resonates as loudly as anarchy.

There is something special about a career that requires an oath. There is something special about the women and men who wear a badge, especially when the pay is not equal to the danger.

Several years ago, my wife was the victim of a robbery. There are two things she remembers vividly to this day: The gun her attacker used and the police officer who responded to her call. She remembers the officer's professionalism and his concern. That officer is now Police Chief Jason Salazar of the Visalia Police Department. He made a difference that day and continues to do so today.

So to those of you thinking about a career in law enforcement, we need you. For those of you who are protecting all of us today, thank you. Stay safe. We need you.

Tim Ward
Tulare County District Attorney