

OPINION

“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”

FIRST AMENDMENT TO THE U.S. CONSTITUTION



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Why Trump is right about police doing too much

Jason C. Johnson

Opinion contributor

President Donald Trump's executive order on policing has been pilloried by the “defund the police” crowd who want substantial police reforms. But Trump's approach represents the best hope yet for improving policing.

In fact, Trump's proposal embraces defunding advocates' criticisms that law enforcement has become a catch-all for society's ills and resorts to force too often. By narrowing the role of policing, both police critics and supporters can achieve their aims.

The true aims of advocates for defunding are as slippery as a wet bar of soap. Contorted definitions of defunding abound. Christy Lopez, a professor at Georgetown Law, argues, “For most proponents, ‘defunding the police’ does not mean zeroing out budgets for public safety, and police abolition does not mean that police will disappear overnight — or perhaps ever.”

This kind of double-talk (defund doesn't mean defund, abolish doesn't mean abolish) reveals that many critics are trying to co-opt the phrase and sideline anti-police extremists. Setting aside police abolitionists, mainstream defunding advocates are right that effective police reform does require scaling back the duties and expectations that local governments and communities have for police. When all other government or community services have failed or are unavailable, the police are the agency of last resort.

Let police focus on public safety

In curtailing these demands, overburdened departments and officers can focus on their primary and essential duty — public safety — and carry it out with professionalism and skill.

Meanwhile, resources can be more effectively targeted at community needs that do not always require a police response. Notably, the homeless, substance abusers and those with mental illnesses (often overlapping categories) need social services, including counseling, medical attention and housing instead of time in jail.

Similarly, some domestic incidents do require police, but in a support role with counselors on hand to resolve conflict.

This is precisely the kind of response protocol called for in the president's plan. Having federal support for additional training in deescalation of force and responding to mental health crisis is a key step in building the professional capacity of our police. At the

same time, expanding the use of mental health professionals as first responders in a crisis is critical.

The good news is a number of police departments already are doing this. Dozens of major departments have hybrid teams that include social workers, counselors, medical personnel and police.

These teams take different forms across the country but prioritize helping those in need more than enforcing the law. Before the progressive mantra became “defund,” prominent left-leaning justice reform group praised the approach as a model for more effective policing outcomes.

But this approach is not really defunding as much as diverting resources and refocusing police roles. If properly executed, police may return to protecting the innocent full-time instead of a patrol officer wearing the hat of a social worker, grief counselor, dispute mediator as well as law enforcer.

Although many police departments have tried to meet expanded duties by investing in more training, a fully professionalized law enforcement system requires high-level, exhaustive but narrow training. Only then can we set clear metrics for success and hold everyone accountable for their performance. By asking too much, we cannot expect undertrained and under-resourced officers to deliver results that meet our expectations.

Bolstering non-police support systems will take resources and time. Effective and efficient service delivery to the most vulnerable cannot be achieved overnight or by simply repurposing police budgets.

New dollars allocated to a city department do not produce the same level of results as existing dollars because of start-up costs and inefficiencies that take time to curtail. And substantively improving or “reforming” police performance, even with narrower police roles, requires an investment, not a divestment.

Thus, cutting money from police budgets and simply diverting them to social programs, as the mayors of New York City and Los Angeles plan to do, will solve nothing, and the problems may get worse.

Crime rates drop from past decades

Part of the problem is that many “defund” or abolish the police advocates have never experienced the bad times. Crime has fallen dramatically and almost continuously for nearly three decades.

New York City logged 2,250 homicides 30 years ago. Last year, 300 people were murdered in the Big Apple, even though it has grown by a million people. Nationwide, property and violent crime rates are less than half what they were.

the first peoples there.) Since the entire population of the city now becomes squatters, they will need to leave immediately. The mayor will need to rescind his lockdown orders so people can leave their former homes.

The need for a city is moot, and the council can vote to dissolve the city. The people of the city, especially the former council members, will be able to go on television (worldwide probably) showing that they really understood the need for total divestment of all the actions taken by anyone that preceded them.

Oops, where are they going to go? The ultimate conclusion of their actions must be to leave the western hemisphere.

Brett Romer, Palm Desert

More on mail-in ballots

Mail-in ballots, or vote by mail or absentee ballots, whatever term you choose, is a process that I have used for years both in Arizona and in California. Gen-



Your Turn

Randy Florence
Guest columnist

We have seen this playbook before

After the downturn last decade, we tightened the purse strings. We tried to survive. And we hoped that tourism and hospitality would come back. And it did. But we knew time was moving against us. Even with a strong national economy, our local economy was destined to be impacted by inevitable job losses with the increase in Artificial Intelligence.

On March 17, I penned a letter to the Valley Voice entitled “Coronavirus presents a window of opportunity.” The sum of the article was that we needed to consider different ways of handling issues we'd faced before. The virus was highlighting the structural inefficiencies of our desert and its communities. We had nine different cities coming up with survival plans. And then it got bad.

In the Coachella Valley, 84% of our job losses were for jobs paying \$15 an hour or less. And we were woefully ready for crisis from a bandwidth standpoint. It is almost a moral crime that so many of our underserved communities do not have sufficient access to the Internet. That wasn't a problem for most of our children in Indian Wells, Rancho Mirage, La Quinta and Palm Desert when the schools shut down. How long should we allow these inequities to continue?

Last week, I spoke with Todd Hooks, a local business leader. Todd told me that Coachella Valley Economic Partnership (CVEP) “provides the critical regional advocacy, research, business development and policy analysis infrastructure to support growing a balanced and sustainable Coachella Valley economy, and I think it's time for us to double down on CVEP and the plans it has for our survival and growth.”

If we run the same playbook we ran after the last crisis, we will be in danger the next time something hits.

But think: With the work from home strategies that much of America has gone under, and some industries will be for some time or forever, we have suddenly become a geography of choice. Would you consider moving to the Coachella Valley? Low cost, entertainment, unmatched natural beauty, proximity to most things you might want to visit. Would you convert your second home to your first?

Imagine you have a young family living in a dense, urban area. You've just been told that you can work from home. Now you can live anywhere. With less people. Less density. More property for less price.

I know it seems counterintuitive. But I'm convinced this is the time for us to lean in to the opportunities provided by this valley. To invest more to attract people from all walks of life who can live and work anywhere they want. We can continue to grow the tourism and hospitality dollar. But we can layer that on to another economy built on a larger full-time population. CVEP was formed to serve as the regional economic development entity for the entire Coachella Valley, with a mission to diversify and elevate the economy. It has never been fully funded.

For several years, Joe Wallace and CVEP have tried to open our eyes to the dangers of almost total dependency on tourism and hospitality. They tried to show us how close we are to the tipping point if something happened like it did in 2008. They showed us possible options for expanding our economy.

I believe that CVEP is the exact organization to help with this. This is the time for us to be looking at areas of investment so we can thrive in the future, because we absolutely can. Let your city council know. This is about the valley not only surviving, but thriving. We are stronger together!

Randy Florence, chairperson for Coachella Valley Economic Partnership, lives in La Quinta.



Joe Wallace, the CEO of the Coachella Valley Economic Partnership, talks about the economy on Nov. 19. JAY CALDERON/THE DESERT SUN

YOUR VOICE

It's time to speak up

Our collective frustration. Where are the liberal voices and outrage over the destruction of American cities? Their collective silence speaks volumes! Their Trump Derangement Syndrome knows no bounds. Apparently their hatred for the president far outweighs their love of country.

Exactly how much more of this lawlessness can true Americans take? Our freedoms and values are being trampled on. The silent majority must speak up and soon.

Ellan Batavick, La Quinta

Drastic measures are needed

I have a suggestion for the City of Palm Springs: The city council should declare that all land within the borders of the city be immediately returned to the original owners of the land, the local tribe. (I hope they were

erally I hand deliver my completed ballot to my designated polling place on election day to ensure my voted is counted. (No offense, USPS.)

Every eligible voter should be able to request a mail-in ballot. This will bring into play a verification process as the appropriate election officials will be able to determine that (a) I am alive and registered to vote, and (b) the mailing address for the requested ballot matches the address of record on my voter registration. With both of those conditions verified, I will receive my ballot well in advance of election day.

Mass mailing of ballots completely abandons any minimal verification process. Voter registration lists are notoriously inaccurate. Voters fail to update changes to their status and election officials are reluctant to purge inactive voters from the rolls. The result will be tens of thousands of ballots piling up unclaimed, providing easy pickings for unscrupulous individuals who wish to thwart the system.

John Long, Indio

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