

OPINION & COMMENTARY

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Tim Swarens
Editor of the Editorial Pages
tim.swarens@indy.com
(317) 444-6176

Barbara A. Henry
President and Publisher
barbara.henry@indy.com
(317) 444-8131

Dennis R. Ryerson
Editor and Vice President
dennis.ryerson@indy.com
(317) 444-6169

Pamela B. Fine
Managing Editor
pam.fine@indy.com
(317) 444-6168

EDITORIALS

Crisis management of crime

Quick fixes ignore long-term problems

Our position:

The latest move proves there are consequences to neglecting public safety.

Since the spree of eight murders that shocked Indianapolis over the weekend, city officials have moved decisively — if belatedly — to improve public safety and deal with problems that have led to this summer's crime wave.

First came the additional patrols by the Indianapolis Police and the Marion County Sheriff's departments, along with a bipartisan decision to borrow money from existing funds to pay for 200 more beds at the privately run Jail II for six months. Then Mayor Bart Peterson during a Monday night City-County Council meeting requested an 11 percent increase in the public safety and criminal justice budget for 2007. Prosecutor Carl Brizzi that day announced he would double the number of deputy prosecutors assigned to homicide cases and assign more people to the handgun prosecution unit.

The superior court's announcement Wednesday that it would initiate moves requested by Peterson, including creation of a court for low-level crimes, cutting processing times for sentencing reports by half (to seven days) and moving a part-time commissioner in the drug court to full-time status in order to handle a third full caseload. Other changes call for eliminating backlogs of ballistics tests and DNA evidence at the county's Crime Lab.

All the moves are sensible and helpful. But they come too late for the thousands of citizens who have been victimized by burglaries, thefts and assaults over the past two years.

More importantly, all of this is a legacy and consequence of the long-term neglect of Indianapolis' courts and public safety agencies. City officials are once again forced into developing short-term fixes that ignore other problems requiring long-term thinking. The high price tag of implementation comes just when the city is struggling financially and taxpayers are fed up with ever-rising property taxes.

A crisis is the wrong time to be improving public safety. It's time for the mayor and other public officials to learn from this episode and provide the stewardship required for a long-term overhaul of public safety.



Crunch time: Mayor Bart Peterson sits beside Cale Bradford, presiding judge of Marion Superior Court (left), as he leads the Criminal Justice summit. The mayor convened the emergency meeting last Saturday after a spike in homicides.

MATT KRYGER / The Star

Messy bond process requires cleanup

An example of how crisis-mode moves leave other long-term problems unaddressed comes in the way courts set bonds and ultimately charge alleged criminals.

Jail overcrowding is worsened by the fact that initial bonds are often set too high for low-level felony and first-time offenders — say, \$30,000 for a misdemeanor domestic violence charge. Judges later reduce them by much as 98 percent. But that usually occurs only after the accused have spent weeks incarcerated.

Defense attorney Robert Hammerle knows this all too well. His client, Bruce Hall, had a clean record before

being charged, along with his wife, with neglecting their child with injury. More importantly, Hall was already under the watch of the juvenile court, which was supervising the child abuse case. If the court simply had allowed him to surrender the day of his hearing, the bond could have been lowered from \$50,000 to \$5,000, which eventually occurred. He wouldn't have taken up jail space better suited for a career criminal.

Instead, Hall spent nine days in jail before being charged and posting the reduced bond. The fact that the court doesn't handle bond reductions during initial hearings meant he served the additional time while more violent of-

fenders likely went free.

The typical D-felony inmate averages an 85-day stay at the jail, according to former Superior Court Judge Steve Eichholtz. While many have other pending charges on their rap sheets that keep them locked up, the slow process of determining bail contributes to longer jail stays before trial.

Reforming the bail-setting process isn't the only issue left unsettled. The superior court must scramble for space to accommodate the new night court, notes Presiding Judge Cale Bradford. It will contribute to the long-term space constraints at the City-County Building.

Altogether, it's a mess.

Costs for crime-fighting tactics add up

City Controller Bob Clifford can tell you none of these new crime-fighting efforts is going to come cheap for the city-county government or, ultimately, for taxpayers.

The superior court's package of initiatives, including hiring 29 new prosecutors and public defenders to staff new court dockets, adds at least \$2.2 million to this year's budget, on top of its \$3 million deficit. This doesn't even include the millions in overtime pay to Indianapolis police officers and sheriff's deputies.

The city can't levy tax increases this year, according to Clifford, and it will take time before any new round of fees generates needed revenues. So it must either make cuts in other

agencies or borrow money that must be repaid with future tax revenues. That would add to the \$35 million the city has already borrowed to finance the local portion of the state Department of Child Services budget.

Then there's the \$1.1 billion proposed budget for 2007, to which the package will add another \$5 million. Keeping it balanced is based in part on whether the state will hand over \$20 million in future county-option income taxes and \$13 million in excise taxes owed to the city. State officials, however, may hold onto the latter in order to pay off charges the city owes to the Department of Correction for incarcerating convicted juvenile offenders.

The additional costs now being in-

curring in this public safety emergency are the legacy of past penny-pinching.

Despite estimates from the Marion County sheriff that his department needs another 965 deputies to patrol the 287 square miles of the city it covers, the City-County Council has allowed its current force to fall by 18 since 1990. Nor has it dealt with the long-term underfunding of public safety pensions, which will remain a drag on taxpayers for years.

Now citizens must pay the price for delayed maintenance and overhaul of public safety, not only in terms of innocent blood shed, but in higher taxes and more debt that must eventually be repaid. And that cost is going to be far too high.



THOMAS FRIEDMAN

Israel has better things to do

Warren Buffett. The most important thing you need to know about Israel today and how it has performed so far in the war with Hezbollah is Warren Buffett.

Say what? Well, the most talked-about story in Israel, before Hezbollah started this war, was the fact that on May 5, Buffett, the Berkshire Hathaway chairman and the world's most successful investor, bought an 80 percent stake in the privately held Israeli precision tools company, Iscar Metalworking, for \$4 billion — Buffett's first purchase of a company outside America. According to BusinessWeek, as a result of the deal, Iscar's owners were "likely to pay about \$1 billion in capital gains taxes into the Israeli government's coffers — an unexpected windfall. With the Israeli budget already running a \$2 billion surplus, the government is considering slashing value-added tax by one percentage point to 15 percent."

In May, Israeli papers were filled with pages about how cool it was that Israel had produced a cutting-edge company that Warren Buffett wanted to buy. It was being discussed everywhere, pushing the Tel Aviv stock exchange to an all-time high.

That is where Israel's head was on the eve of this war — and it explains something I sensed when I visited Israel shortly after the fighting started. Nobody wanted this war, and nobody was prepared for it. Look closely at pictures of Israeli soldiers from Lebanon. There is no enthusiasm in their faces, and certainly no triumphalism. Their expressions tell the whole story: "I just don't want to be doing this — another war with the Arabs."

They have so much more to do with their lives, and they live in a society that empowers and enables them to do it.

Hezbollah youth dream of being martyrs, and their role models are Islamic militants who made it to the Next World. Israel spent the last six years preparing for Warren Buffett, while Hezbollah spent the last six years preparing for this war.

In the end, Israel will do whatever it has to do to prevail. But what is so troubling for Israelis is that this war is about nothing and everything. That is, Israel got out of Lebanon, and yet Hezbollah keeps coming. It is all about Hezbollah's need to justify its existence and Iran's need for a distraction.

What is doubly sad is that Lebanon was getting its act together. Rafik Hariri, the former prime minister, represented a whole new type of Arab leader — one who rose to power by being a builder and an entrepreneur. But Hariri was murdered, allegedly by Syria, and now Lebanon's democracy is being murdered by Hezbollah. Once again, in the Arab world, the past buries the future.

Israel mustn't get sucked into that same grave. Israel needs to get a cease-fire and an international force into south Lebanon — and get out. Israel can't defeat Hezbollah, it can only hurt it enough to make it think twice about ever doing this again — and it has pretty much done that. It must not destroy any more of Lebanon, which is going to still be its neighbor when the guns fall silent.

Israel wins when Warren Buffett's company there is fully back in business — not when Nasrallah is out of business. Because that will only happen, not by war, but when Arabs wake up and realize that he is just another fraud, just another Nasser, whose strategy would condemn the flower of Arab youth — who deserve and need so much better — to another decade of making potato chips, not microchips. Nasrallah can win in the long run only if he can condemn the flower of Israel's youth to the same fate. Don't let it happen, Israel.

★ Friedman is a foreign affairs columnist for the New York Times. Contact him via e-mail at letters@nytimes.com.

Higher education, higher aspirations

Our position:

The Campaign for UIndy crowns a stellar recent past for the Southside school and heralds a bright future.

The University of Indianapolis has traveled a long, long way from its modest beginnings as Indiana Central College. There are many ways to measure that progress, and many leaders to credit. Why not start with two numbers, one huge and one relatively small, recorded during the tenure of current president Beverly Pitts.

This week, the Southside institution announced that the first comprehensive fundraising campaign in its history ended with \$75.7 million, exceeding the original goal by more than 50 percent.

Rewind to last March, when Pitts was inaugurated as the 104-year-old school's eighth president. She chose to trim some of the customary grandeur from the ceremony and use the savings to give 10 students up to \$4,000 apiece to study abroad.

Big ambitions, focused priorities. That has been the story of UIndy's ever-accelerating journey since then-President Gene Sease made bold to grab the city's name in 1986, throwing down the gauntlet for himself and successors Benjamin Lantz, Jerry Israel and Pitts.

The first Indiana college to offer an executive MBA program and graduate degrees in occupational and physical therapy, UIndy has seen those programs grow in national stature in recent years. Meanwhile, the overall curriculum, enrollment and physical plant have been rising and shining.

Transformed since the mid-1990s by the Christel DeHaan Fine Arts Center and a host of other capital improvements, the campus extends far beyond its Hanna Avenue boundaries. Scholarship and service mesh in outreach facilities a short drive north at Fountain Square, and global thinking gets applied at the UIndy campus in Athens, Greece.

Launched during Israel's presidency in 2003, the Campaign for UIndy has turbocharged the school's drive for stature among the best Midwestern private

universities. Among its many accomplishments, it has enabled the creation of the unique Center for Aging and Community and the Center of Excellence in Leadership of Learning, a priceless resource for elementary and secondary schools.

The nearly 10,000 donors included Lilly Endowment and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, along with 60 percent of UIndy faculty and staff. Clearly, the people who know universities and the people who know this university agree on a sound investment. The community shares their confidence and pride.



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