

## OUR VIEW

# Big Cop Out

Cops have a tough job, perhaps the hardest job in America: to protect and serve us. In the course of protecting and serving us, police officers often face tense situations and dangerous individuals. We place implicit trust in their badges, seeing them as proof positive that they've received the training necessary to keep us safe. We give them tremendous leeway to determine a person's fate. They have non-lethal weapons as well as firearms. They can be judge, jury and, in extreme circumstances, executioner. There's nothing inherently wrong with affording them this much power, for they're doing jobs that many of us can't and won't.

But cops do make dramatic mistakes. They are error prone. Some do behave recklessly. More than we'd like to acknowledge often engage in criminal acts. Many of the nation's largest police departments have had their reputations besmirched by thug cops who extort drug dealers, bully gang members, foment neighborhood wars, plant drugs on people, steal from department vaults, sell drugs and assault, shoot and kill people. This epidemic of rogue cops spawned the creation of citizens' review boards to investigate officers and coroner's inquest procedures to determine if cops are criminally liable in fatal shootings.

According to its website, the independent Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department Citizen Review Board was "created to receive and review complaints of misconduct filed by any aggrieved person involving Las Vegas police officers and/or corrections officers. Misconduct includes any improper act, omission or decision directly affecting the person or property of an individual due to any violation of LVMPD policies and procedures. CRB members may recommend disciplinary action, if findings show that misconduct occurred, or may recommend additional training or changes in existing policy where warranted."

The board claims credit for "two officers who were suspended in cases that were reopened and reviewed by the police department as a result of the findings of the Citizen Review Board," convincing Metro to make policy changes and retrain officers in arrest procedures and spurring a tripling in the size of the Internal Affairs "to more thoroughly investigate citizen complaints and to better investigate policies and issues raised by the Citizen Review Board." Conceding those victories, it still must be said that the board hasn't been a panacea. Cops violate police policy and, sometimes, the law, more than people think. So why aren't we hearing about it? It could be that the aggrieved aren't filing complaints. Or it could be that board hearings are too adversarial and cops are exercising their rights against self-incrimination.

From news reports, it seems like NBA Finals MVP Paul Pierce could file a complaint. He was briefly handcuffed on Sunday after an early morning traffic stop on the Strip. Pierce passed a sobriety test. So why was he pulled over in the first place? And did his behavior, described as hostile, warrant the cuffs?

A weekend shooting involving Las Vegas police raise the perennial question about cops using lethal force. Metro Sgt. David Valenta fatally shot Anthony Antwan Davis on Sunday after scuffling with the California man. Cops say he pulled a gun and fired.

Such is this Valley's history of cop-involved incidents, that wonder if Davis had to die. There are conflicting stories about Henderson cops fatally shooting a 42-year-old ice cream lady, Deshira Selimaj. Metro cops gave conflicting testimony in the fatal shooting of 17-year-old murder suspect Swuave Lopez, who was handcuffed and fleeing when he was shot. North Las Vegas police are facing three lawsuits from law enforcers alleging misconduct. North Las Vegas corrections officer Marvin Eastman claims cops unlawfully arrested him and booked him into the jail he's worked at for nine years. Metro cops Robert Stringer and Larry Symonette allege NLVPD cops stopped them because they're Black and drove luxury vehicles.

If cops won't police themselves, the Citizens Review Board can't; the coroner's inquest absolves cops and most people don't have the resources to sue police departments, then who's left to protect us from police?



## Federal HIV/AIDS numbers game

By George E Curry  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

MEXICO CITY — When it comes to HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, the federal government has been running a numbers game. That was verified this week when the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention acknowledged that it has been underestimating the number of HIV cases each year by 40 percent. That means instead of 40,000 cases annually — the CDC standard estimate — there were, in fact, 56,300 new infections.

AIDS activists have been saying for years that CDC understated the extent of the epidemic. But government officials turned a deaf ear, haughtily saying they were the experts and community activists who were closer to the community and they did not know what they were talking about.

Phill Wilson, the executive director of the Los Angeles-based Black AIDS Institute, was one of those voices screaming to be heard.

"The CDC's announcement makes me very angry," he said after learning about the new figures. "Had the government listened to the Black AIDS Institute and others — had they respected what we were telling them — there is a possibility that we could have been able to prevent some of these infections."

If the numbers game



GEORGE E. CURRY

stopped there, it would be bad enough. But it doesn't. Equally disturbing is the gap in global and domestic spending on AIDS.

"Over the last five years, the White House and Congress have increased spending on HIV prevention, treatment and support programs for low-income countries dramatically — at the same time that domestic spending has remained all but flat," concludes a report by the Black AIDS Institute titled, "Left Behind."

A chart in the report makes the point. In 2005, U.S. spending on AIDS globally increased by 21 percent while domestic spending on AIDS remained unchanged. The following year, global spending increased by 22 percent and domestic spending decreased by .4 percent. In 2007, international spending jumped by 46 percent while domestic spending increased by only 2.5 percent. This year, global spending is expected to increase by 34 percent while domestic spending inches up by 1.2

percent.

"Black communities throughout the United States continue to bear a disproportionate share of the AIDS epidemic," the Left Behind report states. "More than 500,000 Black Americans are living with HIV, and more than 20,000 or more become infected each year. Blacks living with HIV have an age-adjusted death rate more than twice as high as HIV-infected Whites."

Nearly one of every two people living with HIV in the U.S. is Black. AIDS is the leading cause of death among Black women between 25-34 years and the second-leading cause of death in Black men between 35-44 years of age. Black women are 23 times more likely to be diagnosed with AIDS than White women.

Blacks make up 70 percent of new HIV diagnoses among teenagers.

Stung by those numbers, the Congressional Black Caucus prodded Congress in 1998 to establish a Minority AIDS Initiative, with the goal of reducing HIV-related racial and ethnic disparities.

"Between 1999 and 2008 federal appropriations for the Minority AIDS Initiative roughly doubled, rising from \$199 million to \$403 million," the Black AIDS report noted. "During that same period, by contrast, U.S. government funding for global AIDS programs (excluding research) rose 37-fold — from \$146 million to \$5.5 billion."

The U.S. should be applauded for taking on the leadership role in combating AIDS internationally. But it has a lot more work to do at home.

"While international spending on AIDS by the U.S. government increased

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