

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: PARSONS DIRTY SECRET

Speech by Chief Robert Spinks

Tonight, I am sharing the release of the 2020 Crime in Kansas Report that is published by the Kansas Bureau of Investigation.

Parsons witnessed a drop in Rapes in 2020 along with far less Batteries (misd), Burglary and Motor Vehicle Theft reports. Arson occurrences dropped by one, but there was an increase in Felony Aggravated Assaults. The violent crime increase was driven by a growth in Domestic Violence cases. The overall uptick in the crime rate in Parsons is in line with the trends that the State of Kansas is seeing across the board. Yet, our community's overall trend for the past decade remains to still be trending downward.

As our handout shows, Parsons had an uptick in our crime rate. This is based on a select number of crimes that the FBI tracks uniformly across the Country. We have Part 2 or Property Crime that include: burglary, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft, and arson. Then there are Part 1 or violent crimes that includes: murder and nonnegligent manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault. You get a per capita rate for these crimes or an overall crime rate by dividing your resident population into the number of crime occurrences.

In comparison to our surrounding cities of Independence, Pittsburg and Coffeyville, Parsons has the lowest crime rate for 2020. Our violent crime rate scores higher because nearly 25% of our violent crime involves felony domestic violence assaults.

If we put our per capita crime rate aside, we then were ranked 18th in the state of Kansas for violent crime and 26th in the state for actual reported UCR crimes. Per capita numbers are great but can be impacted when the daytime population increases each day in a city like Parsons. People travel to Parsons to work, visit, or shop.

Every community has varying factors that contribute toward criminal activity. Parsons has a unique socio-economic mix, and we are seeing a decrease in population, with an increase in offender population moving to Parsons. This can be attributed to other communities tearing down housing due to natural disasters or condemning low-income housing.

There will be those who will complain that violent crime is the fault of policing. That is pure ignorance. In my hand is a list of the misdemeanor and felony arrests made by our Department last year. You cannot arrest a community out of crime when there is a revolving door.

As a state we don't want to invest in new prisons, so we merely add more opportunities for probation. As a society we want services but fail to fund the safety nets for at-risk individuals and families. We want mental health services, but then fail to provide adequate in-patient care thus turning county jails into the largest mental health facilities in the nation.

But tonight, I want to focus on our community's number one crime problem . . . domestic violence.

We've all heard there's no place like home. After all, Home is where the heart is. Home is where we want to kick up our heels or let our hair down. Home is where families gather to share the joys of children, of parents, of good food and friends. Home is where we most of all dream of sharing life and love, dreams and hopes, with those most dear to us.

Unfortunately, though, in all too many homes in Parsons, the reality is not so peaceful. In all too many homes, there is not peace but violence. In all too many homes, there is not friendship but fear. In all too many homes love has been replaced by abuse.

The statistics for Parsons are appalling:

- 176 domestic violence investigations including 24 aggravated assaults plus 1 homicide.

Domestic violence can be triggered by socio-economic stressors, unequal power relations in a relationship, illegal drugs, and much more.

We must not forget about these crimes that disrupt homes and destroys families. It is estimated that over 2 million acts of domestic violence take place each year here in the United States.

Domestic violence is an issue that affects all aspects of our society and is not bound by race, economics, or age. It can be blamed for increased medical care costs, decreased productivity, and

increased absences at work. Domestic violence also promotes a culture of depression, hopelessness, and fear. One incidence of domestic violence can create a cycle of despair that is difficult for not only the victim, but also entire families to overcome.

Family violence has a devastating impact on all of us....

And it is an affect that has touched my family . . .

In 1982, my wife's sister Kathy was murdered by her ex-husband, here's an excerpt from a letter to the Indiana Parole Board written by my wife – this was an annual process in our house until the killer's release back in 2012:

Dear Parole Board Members:

Well, this is another year, and yet another opportunity for Tom HEMPEL to attempt to somehow justify, sell or mystify the Parole Board to believe that he has changed, atoned, or evolved from that sad sorrowful day in 1982 when he brutally murdered my sister Kathy WILLEM.

Time unfortunately tends to bury the dead. Time tends to bury the bright souls of victims who have been cheated from live. Time tends to allow the memory of victims and the violence of past crimes against them to also fade. It is for this very reason that the only voices that can speak for the buried, to ensure that the life that was taken from them is remembered and brought forth for the Parole Board to remember are family members like myself. HEMPEL tossed his value as a human being away when he acted with brutal savagery, has continued to spit in the face of society's expectations and has fallen far short of the due he owes for his actions. Rehabilitation aside, how do you rehabilitate a violent prisoner who has failed in every way?

My sister, Kathy endured years of physical violence at the hands of HEMPEL during their marriage of nearly a decade. She like so many victims of domestic violence were trapped in a dysfunctional relationship, HEMPEL did everything possible to keep our family and my brothers away from Kathy, and HEMPEL held Kathy as a prisoner who was forced to endure repeated browbeating, restricted movement and he kept Kathy cut off from telephone contact with family and friends – a typical route for a violent abuser to take. Even in the 1970's Kathy tried to seek the help of the criminal justice system and repeatedly made reports of being assaulted by HEMPEL with resulting arrests being made and the result being merely more and more beatings at the brutal and uncaring hands of HEMPEL.

The psychopathy of a convicted murderer is no greater evidenced by his continued and misdirected attempts to shift responsibility and blame for his horrendous acts to my sister who endured years of physical and psychological abuse and ultimately was murdered at the hands of HEMPEL. Kathy spent her last minutes of existence alone in

a barn as HEMPEL strangled her to death. An irrational crime, an act of passion? No, this ultimate act of brutal control was very cold and calculated; it was a horrific and deliberate act with its premeditation evidenced by his stalking of Kathy prior to his final violent attack and of his attempt to conceal his crime by then burying Kathy under dark, damp bales of hay in this lonely and isolated barn.

As Martin Luther King, Jr., so eloquently said, ***“Morality cannot be legislated, but behavior can be regulated. Judicial decrees may not change the heart, but they can restrain the heatless.”*** So has been the case in successfully changing the attitudes and conduct of a generation through citizen support which Parsons must now engage in.

While the realities of domestic violence are grim, we have hope. Our hope stems from the belief that with education, resources, and support, victims of domestic violence can overcome their circumstances. That hope also lies here with each of you – by taking a stand today to address domestic violence in Parsons. Tomorrow, the Public Safety Advisory Board will begin discussions on a community project to partner with our community groups, schools, college, and faith-based organizations to develop a commitment to wipe clean the stain of domestic violence from Parsons.

#