

More Gumption Needed in 2015

Since I returned to Nassau in 1996, I have written several times about the serious increase of crime in The Bahamas. Each year the crime has gotten worse and worse. I am more convinced that the real problem is that we are too laid back as a people. More so, those parliamentarians who are in position to change laws but refuse to do so are also indolent.

In 2002, when the crime figures were not so high, I quoted in my article "Fixing Our Nation" from Henry Thomas Buckle, who penned the "History of Civilization in England." He wrote: "Society prepares the crime, the criminal commits it." Why are we so angry at the criminals when, by our own indecisiveness, have created them? Why are we so angry at the criminals when we have provided the opportunity for them to thrive as criminals? Why are we so angry at the criminals when we release them to society to do more crime?

Today I am angry, not just at the criminals, but with those who can, by a simple vote, pass laws to prevent some of the injustices in our land, but will not do it. We need more gumption in 2015 to make the changes. Why are three-, four-, and five-time murderers out on bail with neither of the cases even dealt with yet by law? If there is a loophole in the law, then fix it. I call on all parliamentarians to fix it and fix it quickly. Parliamentarians go to the farmland of intelligence and resolve and garner the gumption (*courage, spunk, guts*) to activate laws. The giants of restlessness and violence are no longer in a stupor. They are much alive and angry. The restraining arms of good parenting can no longer hold back the forces of revenge and hatred. We need help. The kind of help we need cannot be activated by the pounding of desks in the halls of Parliament. They need to "pound" out laws that are practical and real to respond to the ugly beast of violence in our land.

I am a great proponent of effective parenting to prevent and reduce crime. I am also aware of the impact of poverty, lack of education, unemployment, promiscuous lifestyle, imbalance home structure on the development of and the increase in crime. However, today, our society is so saturated with the pest of crime that we need a powerful exterminator to knock it out.

THE LAWS

Note that I am not writing this article as a student in law, politician or criminologist. I am writing as a concerned citizen who is a husband, father, grandfather, mental health professional, and spiritual leader. However, I still feel compelled to give a few suggestions to our Parliamentarians to act on them swiftly. If my suggestions are already laws on our books, then enforce them.

1. Create national curfew laws. Amazingly, most tourists who visit our country are living in towns that have curfew laws. Why are we so reluctant to have such laws here? These laws are not to restrict freedom of movement but to better monitor people after certain hours at nights. My suggestion of the law is that no one under the age of 18 should be outside in the public streets, parks, or open areas after midnight, without the presence of an adult or adults, depending on the number of minors. There should be fines for guardians whose dependent children are on the streets after curfew. Curfew can be from midnight to five in the morning.
2. Create illegal weapons laws. It is my view that if someone is found with an illegal weapon on his person, or in a personal property such as a home or car, he should receive a ten-year

prison term; even if the weapon is disassembled, without bullets, or never used. If the weapon was used in a crime (even if no one was injured or killed), there should be an automatic 20-year prison term and an additional one year for each bullet. If a person was killed with the weapon, the perpetrator should receive a minimum term of life in prison with no possibility of parole. The laws should remove the loopholes to prevent or reduce significantly criminals having bail.

3. Revise the speeding laws. It is my view that the speed limits on the highways should increase from 45 miles per hour to 55 miles per hour and that high fines should be applied for violating the laws. There should be a special unit to monitor the highways with surveillance cameras which have the capacity of taking photos of the violations. Too many criminals are using high-speed vehicles to escape the crime scenes. Raising the speed limit and enforcing high fines may allow for less violation of the laws by good drivers and help expose the villains.
4. Revise minor offenses laws. It is my view that our prison is overcrowded with persons who have committed frivolous offences. The clutter has created an unnecessary high expense to tax payers and a considerable level of frustration to the alleged criminals and the penal system. For example, far too many persons are in jail for having in their possession a small amount of illegal drugs and for committing other minor offences. I am suggesting that when it comes to illegal drugs, there should be a cumulative penalty law. For example, If someone is caught with under one pound of marijuana or half pound of cocaine, that person is not put in prison. Instead, the person is fined and required to do three months of community service. The amount of illegal drugs is kept on record. If a person is repeatedly caught with illegal drugs, there should be a stiffer penalty each time. However, a prison sentence will only apply when the cumulative amount reaches five to ten pounds. This kind of approach will save money, free the prison cells, and help the offender. Many argue that prison helps create more criminals. When someone is in prison for a very minor offence the person can become bitter and revengeful. The prison term will only be punishment but not rehabilitation. Once a person is given a prison sentence that leads to a release from prison, the Government is responsible to provide rehabilitation.
5. Accelerate court proceedings. I think it is a shame how backward the courts are with dealing with cases. It is my view that the Government should go in a crisis mode and have twelve months of serious acceleration in dealing with criminal cases to ease the back log and to enable current cases to move more swiftly. Here's how this can work. Increase temporarily the number of judges and magistrates to deal with criminal matters, even if it requires importing the human resource. Then have twenty-four hour, six- or seven-day a week criminal court. Increase the remuneration of judges and magistrates or pay them overtime fees as an incentive to perform well. This will cost money, lots of it; however, it will save lots more money in the long run.
6. Establish around-the-clock judges. When it comes to domestic violence and intimate partner abuse, there is a need for a more sensitive response from the judicial system. A person who needs a protection order on Friday night should not have to wait until Monday morning. A judge should be on call to deal with such matters expeditiously.
7. Revise protocols for minor offenses. I have noted that when a judge suggests or orders a person to seek counseling or other kinds of professional help outside of the court, there is very little or no protocol in place to monitor such cases. There should be proper forms for referral and reporting. There should be proper policies and mandates for what the judges

and probation officers should do in these cases. It is also my view that protocols should be implemented to give authority to police and probation officers to require persons who abused their spouses and have no criminal record to attend anger management/abuse prevention group therapy. Also the records can be expunged if the therapy is completed successfully and no further offence has been committed.

These are only a few of the many suggestions on my mind. I charge the power holders to garner the gumption to do what is needed to act urgently.

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