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I remember almost all of the many victims I encountered as a younger prosecutor. The courage they displayed was remarkable, many times in a system that appeared to disregard them.

One of those stands out, a young fifteen year old girl who was forced to endure an unspeakable ordeal. I remember her face today. She was raped over a period of seven hours by a convicted rapist on parole named David Dokich. He had been given a “slap on the wrist” plea bargain from another county that required him to serve less than six months in prison. If someone had held him accountable that fifteen year old victim would not have been physically abused and emotionally devastated for life. Fortunately, her bravery and truth were seen by the jury. At his sentencing he received 35 years in prison.

In our justice system, actions have very real and lasting consequences. Victims, and the cases that follow, are not widgets to be moved along an assembly line without much, if any, consideration. Simple decency understands this truth. A prosecutor’s ethical responsibilities also requires it. Justice can never be surrendered to expediency or in the face of criticism.

There are many causes of, and some solutions to, the congestion in our court system. More plea bargaining with dangerous criminals is not the answer. Subjecting the men, women, and children of our community to more peril can never be an acceptable “solution”.

An experienced team of analysts, hired by our local courts, found many causes for our current congestion and prepared what is referred to as the Greacen Report. They also recommended several solutions, none of which included more plea bargaining with criminals. In fact, they examined disposition practices and soundly rejected this notion.

Inexplicably, the causes, solutions, and even the report itself have been ignored, in spite of the District Attorney’s Office frequent and persistent encouragement. The causes were several.

Our county’s population has dramatically increased in the past two decades clogging our schools, streets, neighborhoods, and now our courts. One need only to get on our freeways to notice. The practices of our local and state governmental institutions have needed to adapt to these conditions. When they have not, chaos has quickly followed. Such is also true for our criminal justice system.

The courts' analysts found that the management practices of our local court system were "inefficient," "wasteful," and contributed extensively to the congestion. Specifically as to trials, they wrote that "the court has consistently underused criminal trial departments that have been available." Even during our current situation important new judicial resources have been directed away from criminal courts. The latest suggestion by the court leadership was to take two more courtrooms away from handling criminal cases. Predictably, matters have worsened.

The 2006 report also documented a local court culture "with the court granting virtually unlimited continuances." This practice not only pushes today's work onto tomorrow's, its impact creates "a hardship for victims, law enforcement and other witnesses including out of custody defendants."

The analysts were also concerned that "the way the court presently schedules its calendars causes attorney time to be used inefficiently." Our office has encouraged the implementation of changes to no avail. Consequently, an overhaul of court practices of bygone days needs to be done. The numerous recommendations found in the court's own report is an excellent start.

But the solutions are not just local ones; the state government needs to continue to assist. Two years ago I began working with Justice Doug Miller, Assemblyman Russ Bogh, the Chief Justice of the California Supreme Court Ronald George, and representatives of Governor Schwarzenegger to bring additional judicial positions to our community. Last July, Riverside County received seven new judges. This result needs to be replicated.

These are but a few of the solutions possible for our criminal justice system. They must be pursued without regard to animus or one's neglect. There are many dedicated judges in our local courts who can effect positive and meaningful change. It cannot be done without them.

In the District Attorney's Office, each case will be considered, each victim protected, and justice served. Our legal and moral obligations will be met, regardless of one man's convenience or comfort. Our resolve will not shrink in times of challenge or unease, or criticism by lesser men. The safety of our community is at stake.