

Education/Punishment:  
The Need for Balance  
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Last night, as I sat at a Town Hall held by two Englewood, Colorado City Councilwomen, I was happy to have the opportunity to participate, but concerned regarding the long road ahead of us. In spite of attendance at numerous Englewood City Council Meetings over the last couple of months, participation in several Town Halls, and a study session, the job of educating the people of Englewood has obviously just begun.

Oh yes, we have made progress. There are council members and citizens who understand that residency restrictions make it harder, not easier to promote community safety. They get it that forcing registered citizens out of their homes and into the streets pushes them underground, and into survival mode as opposed to “good citizen” mode. People attended the meeting that I had not seen at any of the previous meetings; a couple of them asked questions and made comments; some had nothing to ask or say. We are still reaching just a small portion of the people of Englewood whose City Council is faced with the task of a lifetime, i.e. making a choice between banishment of a whole population of people, and another path, based on education and good law enforcement practices, which gives everyone who is currently a citizen of Englewood a chance to live a safe and productive life.

People on probation (pre-prison) or parole (post-prison) for a sex crime need housing, jobs and pro-social (caring, moral and ethically based) support to re-enter society successfully. Successfully means that they do not desire to do sexual harm to any other human being, and are committed to joining the “community safety team.” While abundant research in scholarly journals shows that an incredibly small number of persons who have committed a sexual offense and who go through supervision and sex offense specific treatment commit another offense, people in general don’t read scholarly journals. They watch the news on television; they follow social media posts, and unfortunately gravitate toward believing what they hear via sensational presentation styles.

A couple of years ago, I confronted a Denver television reporter doing an investigation into sex crimes regarding a teaser for an upcoming news show which included the words “violent sexual predator.” My explanation to her that sexually violent predator or violent sexual predator were not words that applied to all persons who had committed a sexual offense, but to a very small, specific subset of individuals designated as sexually violent predators or SVP’s. Her comment back to me was that those were just words she needed to use to get an audience to watch her report, and that the report itself was not sensationalized. Yet the effect of those three words presented as a teaser is all that is really needed to send the citizenry up the wrong alley in terms of making good public safety decisions in this arena.

While the SVP assessment tools in the State of Colorado were supposed to appropriately capture information designating a tiny percentage of those who commit sex crimes as SVP’s, they have not done that job correctly to this point. A recent outside evaluation called for by the State’s Joint Budget Committee roundly criticized the current SVP Assessment Tool (three of them I believe have been created over the last 18-20 years in an attempt to improve them) for still not properly identifying those who should properly be designated SVP or “high risk”. A fourth is being created currently to fill the gap

until we can convince the Colorado Legislature that we need to revamp the State of Colorado's registration system, including how we evaluate and classify risk levels.

The Englewood City Council has been presented with material that clearly says residency restrictions create an atmosphere of less rather than more safety. A councilman I talked to after a recent study session stated that he did not want "newspaper discussions" of the issues regarding residency restrictions – he wanted scholarly journal articles instead. I told him that the reason I had supplied the council with short, quick reading material was because it appeared that only two council members were researching the issues, and I didn't think that loading people down with hard to read journal articles would encourage the participation of more council members in learning about the subject. The next morning, I supplied the council with 30 or so **journal articles** and the next day with another 20. They now have a stack of reading to review which will demand much time and effort, with answers coming from the journal reading that match the newspaper reports already supplied!

Human beings, with their "higher intelligence" are supposed to be able to make decisions based not on emotion and feelings only, but on serious consideration regarding the truth of the issues involved. While truth is not always easy to discover, in this case, 99.99 – 100% of the literature out there, whether in newspapers that report information supplied by those who have educated themselves in this field, or in scholarly journals and books.

Banishment, a form of punishment used over the centuries in addition to the particular criminal justice system in place at any given time, only seeks to move the problem down the road. In reality, whether someone with a sexual offense in their background lives IN the City of Englewood, or whether they live in a neighboring city and walk into Englewood to commit an offense, makes little difference to the person who is offended against and their loved ones. The only sexual offense in the City of Englewood since the Ryals case was committed by someone who did NOT live in Englewood; rather, they walked or drove into Englewood to commit their sexual crime!

Time spent under probation supervision, in prison, and/or on parole when a person gets out of prison, constitutes the punishment. Hours locked in a small cell, life the same day in and day out, and limited to no contact with the outside world should be just one goal of our criminal justice system. Rehabilitation, restoration, re-entry, pro-social, safe and productive lifestyles and behaviors should be the other. We need to figure out both ends of the teeter-totter, and whether we put the emphasis on the up end or the down end, or try to make sure people get an exactly even dose of both. In reality, punishment in and of itself does little to help people change their lives, their world view, their treatment of others and their acceptance of themselves. It is the bonding with family, neighbors and friends, the opportunity to be productive, and the contribution that a person decides to make to the welfare of all of society and the peace in that person's soul that makes all the difference. That combined with probation and parole supervision, empathic therapists and the nurturing of a community can make all the difference.