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Has policing in urban America become an undoable job?

Statement from Alderman Bob Donovan May 23, 2018

My grandfather was a Milwaukee police officer for 43 years, serving this community from 1921 to 1964 – mostly as a patrol officer – or also known as an old fashioned beat cop.

He walked a beat on the near south side in an immigrant neighborhood just as it is today (the primary immigrants back then were Polish).

During the warmer months I used to love sitting on the porch with Grandpa as he told some amazing stories about those days. I remember men would tip their hats and step aside for him when he walked down the street. Whenever he was called upon to deal with some conflict in the neighborhood he would carefully listen to both sides and then make a recommended solution. Once that decision was offered the people would accept it and abide by it – end of story.

Grandpa never had a degree in law enforcement and he certainly never attended the FBI Academy. Quite frankly, Grandpa didn't even graduate from high school. But he was a damn good cop!

He told me once there were two things that guided him during his 43 years with MPD: (1) Treat people the way you would want to be treated; and (2) Use a little common sense.

That was then – now let's fast-forward to 2018.

Today officers tell me that at many scenes where they've pulled someone over or are attempting to make an arrest, multiple onlookers will immediately have their smartphones out shooting video. These people come out of the woodwork and are NOT there to render aid to the officers.

They are there to scrutinize the officers' actions and to look at ways to criticize or pick apart how they are handling sometimes chaotic situations.

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I argue that this lack of respect for officers from some individuals in the community is also being seen across America, as there is rampant disrespect for authority figures, whether they are officers, teachers, elected officials, public employees or clergy. This lack of respect for authority presents a great challenge to us all.

The evolution of police training has come to the point where officers today are being trained to be urban warriors instead of neighborhood guardians, and that's inevitable, I believe, because of our violent society.

The advent of social media means that video of an incident can be spread across the globe in seconds as fodder for those who are quick to criticize police. This gives some the ability to advance a false narrative to millions who may very well accept it as solid truth.

Often the ones who are the most critical of police are the ones who know the least about officers, their training, or their job.

Since 2015 the City of Milwaukee has spent more than \$22 million on settlements with litigants accusing police of misconduct. We not only live in a violent society but also one that is hyper litigious.

And there's another thing that I just don't get: Why someone would refuse to obey a lawful order given by a police officer.

Perhaps it's our society and the way some have been raised – but I don't truly know. But I will say this: Whenever it (refusal to obey an order) does happen, it never ever ends pretty.

Why anyone in this day and age would want to be a police officer in urban America is beyond me.

On one hand you can attend community meetings and people are clamoring for more cops and increased patrols. But when they do get those patrols that's when the other half of society ramps up its resistance and the lawsuits start flying.

Our officers are truly damned if they do and damned if they don't. While I certainly don't condone it, I can understand why some officers might consider looking the other way and choosing not to engage when driving past incidents of crime.

I truly believe we would all do well, both the police and the community – before we act – to do as Grandpa would and take a deep breath, take a step back, and use a little common sense and treat others as we would want to be treated.