



WISCONSIN LEGISLATURE

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Milwaukee Public Safety Undermined by Dysfunctional Boards

Milwaukee Police Chief Alfonso Morales is under fire for protecting the rights of all citizens of Milwaukee. What's worse is that these attacks are from a dysfunctional Fire & Police Commission whose leader is under investigation, delusional Common Council members who are answering to the mob, and a mayor who is stunningly silent about police and public safety issues. And while Chief Morales may be the target, it is the people of Milwaukee and surrounding communities that will ultimately suffer.

Uncompromisingly protecting lives and property is unusual in Milwaukee, and maybe that's why Chief Morales is being targeted. After the "Don't Chase" and "Kids Will Be Kids" policies of the last decade, actively tracking criminals and protecting lives and property was bound to shake up the community. Many in Milwaukee may find this shocking, but protecting lives and property is the role of police.

A dysfunctional Fire & Police Commission leading the charge to remove Chief Morales. The executive director is voluntarily leaving her position because of the poisonous, political environment. The chairman, Steven DeVougas, is guilty of ethics violations, under investigation for others, and has repeatedly violated the Open Meetings Law. That's just what's public, who knows what else there is? These are the people leading Milwaukee's public safety into an abyss.

The Common Council's idea of police reform is less police. It is seeking a 10% cut in the budget, which would cut the police force by 15-20%. They voted to deny equipment and non-lethal tools to protect our officers and non-rioters because they don't like that the equipment had been used previously. You can't de-escalate a situation when someone refuses to engage in conversation, while attacking you or jeopardizing the safety of others. Ask yourself, if non-lethal tools are unavailable to police, what other tools can they use?

The Common Council doesn't want facts to get in the way of their fiction. Chief Morales is using logic and facts to oppose the cuts. The council is using rhetoric. The fact is cutting the police budget by 10% will lead to more dangerous streets, more crime, fewer solved cases, and cause an exodus of law-abiding citizens from the city. What color is the sky in their world where less police means the city is more safe?

In the meantime, where is the Mayor who presides over the city? Ever since his handpicked Chief, Ed Flynn, quit two years ago Tom Barrett has been silent on police and safety issues. That's not leadership. That's absence.

Crime in Milwaukee is at a high not seen in decades, and is bleeding into the suburbs. Talk to city residents and they'll tell you they're afraid to leave their homes, sick of the epidemic of reckless driving, and fearful for their family's safety. Children are shot while playing in their homes. People in suburbs are seeing more robberies and stolen cars. When police resources must be used elsewhere, who is left to fill the void and keep people safe? The exact people causing the damage will fill that void because that's all that is left.

This isn't to say there shouldn't be debate about police issues. Maybe there should be more community oversight of the FPC. While the current situation is uniquely difficult, the FPC has had troubles for several years. Use of Force policies are complicated and difficult for many people to understand, perhaps they can be clearer. What's causing the spike in murder and crime in the city? Are police forced to deal with too many mental health issues and therefore shorthanded when it comes to crime, traffic enforcement, and gangs? What is the right strategy to turn neighborhoods around?

The issues are many, interconnected and muddy. They can't be navigated by rushing to a conclusion, or pointing fingers. Can those waters be navigated by a rudderless FPC that is ethically challenged at best, and corrupt at worst, along with a Common Council that lives in a fantasy world where less police makes you safer? A mayor that has been absent on police issues for 20 years? A media that portrays law breakers as angels, and the police as a problem? These issues must be discussed calmly and rationally. Unfortunately, calmness and rational thinking two things sorely are lacking right now.

Chief Morales respects the rule of law, and is protecting the community. He knows the rules, knows there must be a fair process and fair play. He knows that police policies and interactions with the public can be improved. He has the respect of the rank-and-file, because they know they'll get a fair shot. When was the last time the force liked the Chief? He may not be perfect, no one is.

At a time when the police world is scrutinized and crime is on the rise, you need steady leadership. That's Chief Morales.

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