



## Andy Shaw: Time For Leaders To Walk The Walk On Chicago Reform Talk

### Description



**BGA President & CEO Andy Shaw talks about solutions to Chicago violence in his bi-weekly column for Crain's Chicago Business.**

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Our approaches to violence prevention, law enforcement, criminal justice and poverty eradication in Chicago and Cook County are in desperate need of repair and reform.

That was breaking news this year to a prominent tweeter in Washington D.C. but not to those of us who live with the fallout every day.

And confronting the challenges got more complicated when unanticipated changes in leadership at the national and local levels drastically altered the playing field, especially as it relates to police reform.

Out are key officials at the Justice Department who were drafting a consent decree to enforce police reform in Chicago.

In is a new administration with a new Attorney General, Jeff Sessions, who opposes federal oversight of local police departments.

And last week 46 holdover U.S. Attorneys were abruptly forced out, including local prosecutor Zachary Fardon, who didn't go quietly.

His resignation letter was a clarion call for federal action, including court-imposed police reforms prompted by a scathing Justice Department review of CPD's systemic racism, poor training, and woefully inadequate supervision, transparency and accountability.

Despite Fardonâ€™s pleas, Sessions may not put any federal heat on Chicago, which means reform is up to Mayor Rahm Emanuel, City Council and police brass.

History tells us police reform is a pipe dream without the same kind of court pressure that ended Chicagoâ€™s patronage system, but if Emanuel stands by his iconic lineâ€” â€”Donâ€™t let a good crisis go to wasteâ€”federal abdication can actually empower city leaders to transcend their craven instincts and finally lead on police reform.

Thatâ€™s never been more important in a city facing:

- An epidemic of homicides in parts of the South and West Sides, sparked by gang and drug disputes, facilitated by a proliferation of guns and fueled on social media.
- A police department that canâ€™t get on top of the violence.
- A criminal justice system that, according to some critics, incarcerates petty criminals too long and repeat gun offenders not long enough.
- And our collective failure to adequately address the intractable root problems that have bedeviled low-income minority communities for decades: Segregation, joblessness, poverty, addiction, mental illness and inadequate education.

Thankfully, glimmers of hope are emerging from this dystopian landscape:

- Chicagoâ€™s top cop, Eddie Johnson, and Police Board President Lori Lightfoot recently outlined a reform plan. Weâ€™ll reserve judgment until they â€”walk the walk,â€” but theyâ€™re clearly â€”talking the talkâ€”feeling and responding to public pressure.
- Two Cook County officialsâ€”Sheriff Tom Dart and Stateâ€™s Attorney Kim Foxxâ€”are leading the charge for overdue bail, jail and prosecution reforms.
- Gun sentencing reform is moving through the legislative process in Springfield.
- And the new administration in Washington is at least listening to requests from Chicago for boots on the ground.

All promising.

But thereâ€™s another key obstacle City Hall has to overcomeâ€”regressive police union contracts that perpetuate a â€”code of silenceâ€” facilitated by insufficient transparency and accountability.

A coalition spearheaded by community and civil rights organizations, along with police reform and good government groups, including the BGA, is pushing hard on that front with the support of Black aldermen.

So stay tuned for updates.

Meanwhile, whatâ€™s clear and encouraging is that long overdue reform wheels are finally turning on many fronts, and weâ€™ll be watching closely to see if the mayor and other public officials can maintain the momentum and deliver on their myriad pledges, even without a federal consent decree and court oversight.

Thatâ€™s the daunting challenge of 2017, and our landmark opportunity.

*PHOTO CREDIT: (AP Photo/M. Spencer Green)*

