Keeping America Crime-Free During the Pandemic: A Conversation with Bill Bratton and Michael Downing

TRANSCRIPT

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- Commissioner William “Bill” Bratton, former New York Police Department Commissioner, former Boston Police Department Commissioner, former Chief of the Los Angeles Police Department
- Deputy Chief Michael Downing, former deputy chief of the Los Angeles Police Department and former head of the LAPD Counter Terrorism and Special Operations Bureau
- John Walters, Chief Operating Officer, Hudson Institute
- Matthew Hunter, Vice President, Strategic Partnerships

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Please note: This transcript is based off a recording and mistranslations may appear in text. For more details on the discussion, contact Matthew Hunter, Hudson Institute Vice President, Strategic Partnerships, mhunter@hudson.org.
Matt Hunter:

Hi everybody. Welcome to this call. Thank you all for joining us. This is Matt Hunter, Vice President for Strategic Partnerships at Hudson Institute. We're very happy to have you join us. We spent the last couple of calls talking about the security situation around the world with General McMaster, General Petraeus, some of our own experts. We're going to look at the security situation here at home. We're going, today, by two major figures in law enforcement.

Our first guest, to those of you in New York and Los Angeles, needs no introduction. Two-time NYPD Commissioner, Bill Bratton, who also served as Police Chief in Los Angeles, and Commissioner of the Boston Police Department. We're also joined by former LAPD, Deputy Chief Mike Downing, who ran the LAPD Counter Terrorism and Special Operations Bureau, and served as interim Chief of the LAPD upon Chief Bratton's departure. The conversation is going to be moderated by our own Chief Operating Officer, John Walters, who many of you know himself has a background in law enforcement, serving as Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy in the Bush 43 Administration.

The last thing I'll mention before we jump into the discussion is a reminder. Tomorrow we're going to be joined by Senator John Barrasso of Wyoming, who is also a medical doctor by training, to talk about Congress' response to the pandemic, and he can offer his unique insights both as a law maker, and a medical professional. So with that we'll turn it over to John.

John Walters:

Thank you Matt. And I want to particularly thank Commissioner Bratton, and Chief Downing for being with us. This is a real honor to talk to you guys again. I worked with Chief Bratton many years ago. And I want to thank him for the real leadership he's provided in American law enforcement, that changed policing in America in a profound way. Some of that, I think, will be relevant now to our discussion. But let me begin by asking both of you the starting point for the circumstances that we now see with public safety and policing, had a predicate before the virus with changes in attitudes of respect for officers, and even some reports of assault on police personnel that really were not seen before. Can maybe, Commissioner Bratton, if we can start with you? Can you talk a little bit about the nature of the circumstances that law enforcement faces now, and then we'll get into the specifics of what the current epidemic creates as problems for law enforcement?

Commissioner Bill Bratton:

Okay. Well thank you very much for the opportunity to speak with you and all of your guests this morning, and that hopefully the voice quality is working on this line. That prior to the Coronavirus crisis, America law enforcement was already in crisis. And that crisis goes back to the period around 14’, 15’. The incidents in Ferguson, Missouri, incidents with Michael Brown. Incidents in New York City, during the time that I was Police Commissioner, Eric Garner, the stranglehold, a choke hold situation. And there was a criminal justice reform movement that had launched, that was very aggressively trying to change the face of criminal justice in America, and police practices, criminal justice practices as related to jails and prisons. And policing was really feeling under attack at that juncture.

So as we come into the current crisis, that policing, as a professional, is feeling somewhat under appreciated despite significant gains it made in recent years in reducing crime throughout the
country, New York City and Los Angeles being two of the lead entities in that success story. But we're really feeling that it was now on the defensive, and the issue of criminal justice reform, something that I've been speaking out on, that Mike Downing has spoken to, that American chiefs are speaking to. We're not opposed to it, but opposed to, if you will, the extent of some of the changes that we look for at this juncture. Including significant reduction in prison population, which would support our goals. But the way it's being done we're very opposed to. New York City, New York State are leading the way in that regard. But even before the effort, the jail population in the state prisons of New York were down by almost 40%. Rikers, back in 1994, when I was Commissioner the first time, had a daytime population of 22,000. That population is down under 5,000. We're not opposed to it, but some of the people that are being let out should not be.

So just to set the stage that as we're going forward, one of the concerns that I would have looking forward into the spring and summer months is that the significant reduction in prison population, in response to the Coronavirus, and criminal justice reform initiatives. The advocates are using the virus, I believe, to strengthen their case, and push ahead even more people let out, and some of those that are coming out are really going to create a second waive of crisis for the American population. In that, even as we deal, successfully, hopefully, with the Coronavirus all through the summer, and early fall, we're setting the stage for another type of virus, and that's a potential return to criminal virus, that scourge of crime once again.

We're going to, definitely, try to mitigate that, but the problem is going to be compounded by government-weakened police forces that have expended phenomenal resources on dealing with the virus, and all of its issues, and, once again, having to face a criminal population that has been significantly enlarged by the reduction in prison population. Hopefully a lot of those people will have reformed, but I think the current significant reduction of crime that we're experiencing, during the virus, that we're going to see a return to it as we go forward.

That's just one of the issues that policing is dealing with at this time, among many. There's also the crisis within policing ranks, as in every profession in America today, officers impacted by the virus, or the other employees. NYPD, there’s thousands upon thousands of officers out ill at this time, including many who actually have the virus. And so while they're dealing with it, we are by all accounts in the early stages of it, that we're still on the ascent, we haven’t reached the plateau, and we're going to have to watch very closely how departments respond to that. While I’m not in policing any longer, I stay in close touch with it, as you might appreciate, to various organizations, contact with a lot of Chiefs of Police. And in anticipation for this call, I've been in touch with the Chiefs of Police in Los Angeles, Chicago, New York, Houston. Very close touch with the police executive research forum, which is one of the leading think tanks in American policing. And as well as in conversation with another of my colleagues, chiefs, who are ill with the virus, including James Craig, the Chief of Police of Detroit. And how an ill chief is trying to deal with leading his department, while also, basically, fighting the virus.

So we are in uncharted waters. So far, I think, we've been doing well. But as I mentioned, people are turning it over to Michael, that we’re on an ascent. We’ve not reached the plateau yet. And, I think, as we get toward that plateau, the stresses are going to increase significantly. Including the issues around lack of equipment. Medical people certainly have to have the top priority, but policing is also suffering the same issues of lack of gloves, lack of masks, and lack of protection if you will.
Chief Michael Downing:

Yeah, thank you Chief. I was just going to... I mean, how can I add to that. But I was just going to say that this is one occurrence, crisis, emergency, that law enforcement is not the lead in. Public health is taking the lead in. And I think law enforcement, American law enforcement, really has to be careful right now not to burn up all their pitchers in the third inning, so to speak. And that there is, probably across the country, there's somewhere between a 5 and a 15 percent reduction in crime and calls for service. And this is the time where American law enforcement is planning for that next season of crime, as the Chief, the Commissioner said. I call him Chief because he is the great American Police Chief.

This is the time where really planning for those hot summer months, that are coming, that have always been, we've seen increases in crime. And now with the prison population reducing, and going out into the communities, that's when American law enforcement is going to be called into action in terms of being effective, using their accountability systems to drive crime down, and keep their relationship with communities. Now, it's really a period of time where public health is taking the lead. Across the counties and the operational areas they have unified commands, and area commands where police are in a supportive role. And they're almost seen as... For example, firefighters in uniform, it gives people a sense of comfort. I don't think we're at the point where law enforcement is going to be as challenged as they are in the next few months.

John Walters:

Well thank you both. You touched on a couple of points that maybe we can follow up on a little bit more. First, I want to ask you about the health, safety of personnel, and readiness? And Commissioner Bratton, you talked about having conversations with chiefs around the country. Obviously some of these departments are seeing people who are already themselves sick with the virus. How extensive is the health and readiness concerns that you're seeing, and you expect to see, both of you, in the weeks and months ahead?

Commissioner Bill Bratton:

Well I'll pass on a comment, this is Bill Bratton again, from Chief Charlie Beck, who is the acting Superintendent in Chicago. Charlie worked with me and Mike in the LAPD, and then succeeded me as Chief for nine years. Charlie, in talking with him about this call, and the list of issues that he's facing. Now, this is an experienced Chief with almost 40 years in the business. An interesting comment that he's watching his sick call numbers, as much as he used to watch his murder and shooting numbers. And this is in Chicago, which kind of leads the country in both of those categories. So in this health crisis, some of the prioritization is shifted.

And also, interestingly enough, we always think of cops on the front line, and our surveying employees, are often not even thought of, because nobody really thinks of them when you think of police. But in this crisis, probably one of the most important people in America is the 911 call operator. The person that is sitting there taking all those medical calls, taking all those police calls. They are truly the linchpin, in terms of the lifeline that EMS, fire, and police provide to the public. I was just on the phone with the chief in my hometown, here in Hampton Bays on Long Island, and he, along with his colleagues around the country, as he began to prepare for this crisis, focused very significantly on the weak spot, if you will, the 911 call centers.
Because, unlike years ago when those were pretty simplistic, there was a phone, somebody answered it, made a few notes and dispatched the call, they're incredibly sophisticated equipment that they're using and looking at, and they cannot easily be replaced by others if they take sick. So that issue of concern and, if you will, the reordering of priorities is something that every American police chief is having to deal with.

They're all attempting to learn from each other. PERF, Police Executive Research Forum, has enhanced its daily newsletter to, effectively, incorporate tales from the front lines, which are used for sharing issues, experiences so that other chiefs can be prepared to deal with them.

The good news going into this crisis, as Michael and I found as we called them out prior to this conference, is that American law enforcement really prepped for this in many, many ways. We are good at responding to a crisis and we've had, unfortunately, so many of them in America in recent years.

With fires in California, hurricanes and the floods on the East coast, the tornadoes, we were, I think, well prepared for this even though none of us anticipated the scale of it.

The major deficiency right now does seem to be equipment. The medical profession and the public safety profession are both suffering from phenomenal shortages of medical equipment, masks, gloves, sanitizer sprays, and it is a significant weak link in our battle against this virus.

I've never seen a time when the private sector has had to step up so much to support the public sector in the crises. I was just on a phone call this morning where a very wealthy gentleman in Manhattan has been able to identify a location of three million masks that he's going to be donating to New York City, while Kraft last night, using the Patriot plane, flew almost a million masks from China that he had arranged personally and privately to get.

So, we've got significant government deficiencies on the equipping and the pre-equipping for this crisis that we're having to deal with in the middle of it.

Chief Michael Downing:

I think that, as the commissioner said, the way we've been planning for this in the past, relative to planning for terrorist attacks or natural disasters, that cooperation that we've had with the federal partners, the state partners, is playing out a little bit here.

For example, the InfraGard Program, which is spread across America, is really a private sector program. I know on the west coast here, they've activated all their resources to help bring this type of equipment, that the chief was talking about, to first responders and they've listed it out. They've listed suppliers, they list the distributors, and they're getting it out because the government itself doesn't have adequate resources to protect them.

Another interesting thing is that the chief talked about the dispatchers, and they are so crucial right now. I ran our communications center for about a year or so, and the training that they are providing the community and the officers to limit the exposure that the officers have with the call is absolutely crucial right now.

Another interesting fact is that, in the major cities, the 64, 65 major cities across the United States, it's a practice of putting two people per car. When you put two police officers per car, you're going to double the exposure. So things people are thinking about... Do we have to
reorganize the way we set up our basic car plan, as well? So I think there’s a lot of challenges we haven’t thought about and there’s a lot of brainstorming going on to try to limit the exposure to the officers and keep them healthy.

Commissioner Bill Bratton:

Michael, in that regard, in a conversation with James Craig, the chief of Detroit, who you and I both worked with in LAPD before he became chief in Detroit. He has the coronavirus and he framed it with the comment that this current crisis is, for policing, all about anticipating the what-ifs.

We always try to plan ahead for major events, natural disaster, et cetera. But this one, more so than what any of us have ever experienced, is about anticipating the what-ifs.

In regards to the comment about the two officer cars, which New York City has, by-and-large LA, Detroit, the chief looked at that and tried to think about, "can I reduce my exposure to my personnel by going to one officer cars?"

But the danger in his city, and I would say probably in Chicago, New York, LA or the major cities, that his personnel still continue to face, even though crime is down fairly significantly in some cities, others shootings, murders are still not, that he has opted against splitting up his officers.

I know New York was considering potentially still sending two officers to every call but, basically, having single offices in separate cars that would run in tandem with each other.

Chief Michael Downing:

Correct.

Commissioner Bill Bratton:

But, as they looked at it, it would require a phenomenal number of vehicles and, even though that department has about seven or eight thousand vehicles, it would not have enough to basically support that citywide.

These are just some of the quandaries that the chiefs finding themselves in, as well as policing is a basically, to use the expression, in-your-face profession. It requires getting close to people, either criminals or the public in general. So, effectively, the six-foot rule that is so applicable, offices and medical professionals really can't practice that. They basically handle the medically incapacitated. Incredible difficult assignments that they're being expected to face, but their situation is not unique.

Grocery clerks are on the front line. Whoever thought, in our lifetime, that one of the primary providers of lifestyle sustenance in our daily lives would be the grocery store clerk? The person standing at the cash register or restocking the shelves.

So, your comment about police who are usually at the top of the prioritization list, there’s a lot of competition for who should be at the top of the prioritization list during this kind of situation.
Yeah. I wanted to also go back to something you touched on earlier. That is the changes in the
demands on officers and departments, and what's changing and what's increasing. You
mentioned there has been crime on decline, it's also seasonal.

But as we expand things like lockdowns in cities... As you pointed out, there's not only the
changes in New York, that had been noted and somewhat notorious, about removing bail, but
also releasing individuals from jails and prisons as a result of infections.

How do you shift here? What do you see as the major anticipated places where there's going to
be most stress on policing and what are the biggest changes from the routine that you
anticipate, not only what's happening now but in the weeks ahead?

Commissioner Bill Bratton:

The stressors are many, and we've referenced some of them already. Personnel availability.
New York is up, I think they said this morning, about 17% of its personnel. Huge department
with 55,000 personnel, 36,000 police officers, has a depth of coverage that many cities and
towns do not.

18,000 police departments in this country, the majority of them have 25 or less officers. If they
lose 15, 20, 30% of their departments, they are incredibly impacted. That's at this current time,
coming winter into spring and, as Mike referenced, traditionally we watch for the warmer
weather, particularly in the inner cities, for concerns about traditional upticks in crime.

That has not been as prevalent in the last 20 years when we started getting a handle on it, fin-
ally, in the 1990s, but the surge, we still worry about more people out in the street. We're
benefiting with some of the crime reduction because on most American major cities that have
stay-in-place orders, they're staying in place.

But as this goes on into warmer weather, apartments that are not air conditioned, frustration,
people without paychecks. We are really, I think, just watching a gathering storm at the moment
and trying to look at, as Chief Craig would say, the what-ifs.

What if the economy doesn't start picking up again? What if people, even with the subsidies
from the federal government, it's not enough to feed their families? What ifs of all these people
coming out of jail, where are they going to go? You're going to put them in the shelters. Are they
going to back in the home environments where, in many respects, the crimes they're accused of
committing involve domestic violence? The list of what-ifs goes on and on and on.

Good news is we've got a very experienced profession, very different than the profession I
joined 50 years ago when it was not a profession in any way, shape, or form. We've come a
long way, assisted significantly by technology over the last 20 years in particular. 30 years.

The technology issue we have not touched on, and we should because that is both a tale of two
cities. Best of times, worst of times, we could not be functioning as effectively as we have been
to date without the technologies available to us, whether it's the use of data transmission
capabilities, the smart phones, radios, all the things that police get to work with now, that the
public gets to work with.

At the same time, for policing and the public, is the negative aspects of that. Identity theft. My
wife spent three hours on the phone earlier this week. She was trying to basically get a
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temporary change of address from the post office, got onto the wrong site, and basically ended up getting into one of these fraudulent sites and spent three hours trying to unwind from that.

There are so many people out there trying to take advantage of this crises. A story on the TV this morning, Zoom, one of the most popular of these video conferencing. I'll be on one at one o'clock.

Access onto Zoom by people putting pornography on there and anti-racial types of literature, we have that concern. We have an issue with terrorism also, which basically comes into the world of technology increasingly in the 21st century, and that's Michael's particular area of expertise. Mike is probably one of the top experts in America, if not the world on this issue. He helped to create a consortium of terrorism commanders across the country and internationally doing assignment policing. The terrorism issue, interestingly enough, while they would like to get into it, they have not really found a way other than encouraging ISIS and others, some of these far right militant nuts encouraging people to engage in activity, but in checking with the NYPD that I stay pretty close to, their intelligence division, we've not actually seen any actual incidents of significant terrorism that is taking advantage of the virus at the moment. Not to say that they're not going to try to, lessons learned, engage in that type of activity going forward. But up until this point, American law enforcement has not really picked up any uptick in what we would describe as life-taking, life-threatening terrorist activity. Mike am I correct on that? I know you stay very close to it all so.

Chief Michael Downing:

Yeah, absolutely chief, I think there's some aspirational single issues that have occurred with some right wing extremist groups that wanted to target law enforcement and Jewish communities with this coronavirus issue and how to spread it, but it's really when you look at intent and capability, it's really not there. But with that said, I think American law enforcement really has to be careful to resist the temptation to diminish their intelligence platforms. And there are organizations that work with the JTTFs and the fusion centers across the country because this is an opportune time if they wanted to plan an attack. But you're correct, we haven't really seen any ... I think that the threat reduction programs are alive and well across America right now. People are collecting on the threats that they see, but there is no specific information that shows any groups right now are planning to attack.

Commissioner Bill Bratton:

As a follow on to that, Michael, in a discussion with Charlie Beck in Chicago, one of the concerns that were voiced earlier in this conversation is that the necessary prioritization of coronavirus response on the part of public safety agencies. That the reassignment of personnel to make up for officers out sick as well as reprioritization. That the area of concern as it relates to crime control, whether it's terrorism or traditional crime is that offices whose assignment is full time to do just that counter-terrorism intelligence, narcotics enforcement. That the real risk as we go forward in this ascent stage is that more and more of those officers will be pulled away from those assignments thus diminishing what is so essential in our world of policing intelligence. As well as the ability to respond quickly to what that intelligence indicates for us.

So Charlie Beck was talking about in Chicago, the crime labs had been diverted from doing tests on drugs seized by police officers to doing coronavirus testing. And as a result, the
narcotics enforcement issues in Chicago have effectively ground to a halt because even if officers make a drug arrest, there is no ability to basically process that evidence. That would be compounded if that occurred in New York City under the Criminal Justice Reform Act that the legislation in Albany passed last year in their infinite wisdom. This effectively requires that district attorneys have to present to criminal defense attorneys within 15 days of an arrest. Everything that has to do with that arrest, including all lab tests and it is impossible under normal circumstances to do a lot of the complicated lab tests necessary, DNA, chemical, etcetera, in 15 days under normal circumstances. Let alone in circumstances where they may be delayed for many months.

So these are just for the audience, some of the myriad issues that American law enforcement is wrestling with. Some of the what ifs as Craig described them.

Chief Michael Downing:

When we're talking about what ifs, I wanted to ask you that now there's a range of predictions about how bad this gets. Obviously we all hope that the suffering, the sickness and the death is minimal, but if this gets worse and extends for a longer period. I just wondered if you could tell folks listening to us, what would you look at as key indicators of stress in the law enforcement system that they should be concerned about. Or they should be aware of as this goes forward? You mentioned something about some of the internal personnel, 911 operators and so forth, but can you mention a few of the key indicators that may indicate the systems being overstressed?

Commissioner Bill Bratton:

A measurable one certainly is reflective of Charlie Beck's prioritization of looking at his sick calls more then he looks at his murder rate. The idea of having fewer and fewer personnel resources or appropriate police resources such as 911 operators to deal with the crisis going forward. Other indicators would be the apparent lull that we have in increasing crime. If that's coming back with the warmer weather. Gang bangers getting back out in the streets and finding victims to shoot more readily and easily. There would be also the issue of if there were to be a successful terrorist attack that would upon analysis be determined that it occurred because we had diverted resources from watching for that.

The growth from the far right, that growth that we had been experiencing, the attacks on religious groups, Jews, minority groups, African Americans, Latinos. If we see an increase in that type of activity whether it's virtual or utilizing technology or actual attacks that as this goes forward. There is no shortage of what ifs, that could be looked at as measures indicating that the situation is deteriorating. And that deterioration is reflective of historic and traditional attention being drawn away from it and now being mitigated by the lack of resources to focus on it.

Chief Michael Downing:

Yeah. I just want to add the population that is dealing with mental health challenges now and the stresses that's putting on that population, whether it be a percentage of the homeless population. Tuesday we had a train and the driver, drove the train headed toward the Mercy Navy ship in L.A. port. Now, I don't believe this was a terrorist attack. I don't believe there's an ideology associated with it, but there is an indication of somebody that just snapped and I think
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that mental health challenge that we see in many populations is going to be exacerbated by the pressures we see with this crisis that we have and the services and resources we need to put on that population.

**Commissioner Bill Bratton:**

I mean, let me just add to that. Like in terms of the emotional toll that everybody is experiencing. The conversation this morning with the chief of police out here. I mean, that his 95-year-old dad had just passed away yesterday and the difficulty of mourning. How do you mourn when you can't bring people together and by coincidence in another call, back with the NYPD. Three of my former security detail are now working with the new commissioner. On the same day, three of them had a parent die, yesterday. And so just a coincidence on these phone calls this morning is four deaths were officers who were involved in the middle of this. Now trying to deal with the death, where normally they would take a leave of absence for several days to put it together. Do the normal wake and funeral.

Now the inability to, if any of these were coronavirus, [the inability] to even see the deceased, let alone the difficulty of trying to arrange funeral arrangements where you kind of have a wake, you kind of have a church service. That emotional toll, that's going to linger. And that's across the spectrum of people who are normally emotionally healthy. That the tremendous pressures that are being brought to bear universally across every class, across every race, across every state, across every city. Those are some of the what ifs. What is that going to result in going forward?

**John Walters:**

Yeah. I want to turn to a couple of questions that our listeners have sent in. One is from Ed Cox, who notes park that Commissioner Bratton you played in developing, creating, demonstrating community policing and from the beginning. He asks, what does community policing mean today when the viruses here and being together on the street is a problem? Is it even possible, I think is a good question.

**Commissioner Bill Bratton:**

Well, the policing back in the 70s, my first engagement, we call it neighborhood policing. The 90s, the buzzword was community policing and once again more recently in New York, it's now neighborhood policing again. Something that I and Chief O'Neill championed. Good news for New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago, where Chief Becker is not working. A lot of major cities really embraced this concept of trying to get their officers to be seen in a better way in the communities they're trying to police. The idea that they weren't just there enforce the law, but they were there to work with the public. And the risk we're running at the moment is that as we go forward with these stay at home orders and increasingly watch on the news, where governors and mayors is starting to insist that their police forces start enforcing it more assertively. That some of the gains that we made in trying, in much safer the time with a lot less disorder on our streets in many cities.

That we run the risk of reengaging in a way that the negativity between police and community increases once again. And that is something I really worry about that we had gone through the ... And we're still dealing with the stop question and frisk crises in America and the racial
tensions that that generated particularly certainly here in New York City and L.A. and other cities. And a challenge for American policing going forward into this crisis is it may require us to at times go back and put on our other hat from enforcement rather than assistance and we're going to have to really work hard. The chief knows, that is still in the business. Michael and I and on the private sector advising largely CEO clients but for those of our colleagues who are still in the business are going to have to work very hard with their officers to ensure that the right balance is found between enforcement and assistance, and it's a tough challenge at any time. It's even tougher and weeks and months ahead.

**John Walters:**

I have another question from Laurie Hunter who, part of it you touched on, which was the effects on releasing prisoners. But the other is she mentions, as this extends, many departments have canceled training and put people on the line and she wonders what happens? How long does that robbing Peter to pay Paul, how long can it continue before you end up with a real degrading of capacities of departments?

**Commissioner Bill Bratton:**

Michael, let me kick off a response to this is I just had several conversations with NYPD earlier this week on this. NYPD is canceling its recruit classes. It normally has four of them a year, six, 700 officers. The longer that goes on the drain of officers on the virus side, officers, now the others who don't come back, others who retire, every police department needs to replenish resources in the best of times. Many departments were struggling the last several years because of the assault on American policing. It was no longer the profession that a lot of people wanted to belong to. So we're already struggling. And I think this is going to compound that recruitment issue to replenish those that are leaving.

The training issue you're talking about, we've come so far from the six weeks of training I received before I was put in the street back in 1970. Average police department now trains for at least six months and even that's not nearly enough. But the in-service training, that's after an officer already becomes a police officer, has always been abysmally poor in American policing. Got better in some larger agencies: LA, New York and others over recent years, but that's going to suffer totally because no department is going to have the ability to put offices into classrooms that they have to socially isolate. So that's a great question and that's a number of what ifs. What if this goes on for another six months, which seems to be, everything I'm looking at, this is not ending on Easter Sunday, that's for sure. That what if this goes on for six months and we can't train, we can't hire, we can't screen. Those are what ifs they're starting to look at, but nobody has an answer for that at the moment.

**Chief Michael Downing:**

That is a great question and I think there will be a consequence that will be paid later down the road. I know that many of the organizations that I've talked to over the last week are using some of this time to exercise and train and dust off some other contingency plans that they have. I think the big white elephant in the room that nobody really wants to talk about is if this does get bad, people don't get paid and they can't eat, when it gets hot what's going to happen. I know we're really not in an era right now that we were in in the '90s. It doesn't feel like it in terms of inequality, racism, hatred, et cetera. But survival is an issue. And so I think police departments
across America have that in the back of their mind and they don't want to talk about it, but I do believe there's some exercising and training and dusting off of contingency plans and refreshing partnerships between federal, state, local people on this issue.

Commissioner Bill Bratton:

If I may, there's an essentiality, a strength at the moment. Over the last, well, first part of my career, first 25, 30 years, '70s, '80s, the tensions between federal, state and local were tremendous. And city of Boston probably had one of the worst sets of scenarios where everybody was at each other's throats and undermining each other. Even here in New York for a period of time in the '90s. I think in the 21st Century we've turned a corner where, I can certainly speak to the cities I worked in, chiefs I know, that there was a great coming together, a collaboration, particularly around the issue of terrorism initially, but over time, once that barrier was broken down, that the level of coordination cooperation has never been better. Not to say it's anywhere near it should be, but it has come such a long way. And that will be a great assistance going forward that I referenced on this call, all the different chiefs I've reached out to in anticipation of this call. But they're chiefs I keep in touch with anyway, even though I'm no longer in the business, because what goes on in public safety impacts in the private sector where I now work.

But we're better informed, we're better led. Police chiefs in America, they're totally different than what we had back in the the good old days. And the coordination between them, and between federal and state and local, will be a great assistance, not only dealing with the virus but in dealing with the traditional crime and terrorism that is the usual work of policing.

John Walters:

Let me ask you a last question. I'm going to combine one from Phil Cohen-West about how dangerous is the relationship between the NYPD and the mayor and its effect on "sick outs" or other kinds of demonstrations of friction there. And combine that with a larger question about this whole issue of releasing prisoners. A number of jurisdictions now are, not only releasing, but they're not taking people into custody. And I wonder if this, we talked about this going on for six months, how do we have law enforcement without being able to detain or to incarcerate dangerous public safety threats in the future?

Commissioner Bill Bratton:

Well, prior to the virus, this has been a subject of great discussion nationally, not just in New York, those that live in New York and actually focused on what happens here, those in Chicago. But I watch it very closely around the country and stay involved with a lot of my former colleagues. So whether Chicago, LA, Seattle, Philadelphia. There was this criminal justice movement with district attorneys, ironically, we're becoming almost adjuncts of the criminal defense bar. That they were advocating more for the defendants than they were for the victims. And there was a great and growing tension before the virus. The arc was, like being the epicenter of the virus, was the epicenter of that issue also. And that's still playing out as recently as the newspaper accounts today of what our legislature up in Albany is planning for the future. We were concerned when they started reforming the reforms that were awful in the first place that they would make them worse. And based on the outlines of what's going on up there, they are going to make them worse.
So coming out of the virus issue, and we will, that this is going to be an unresolved and worsened circumstance because during this crises, many who should not have been let out will have been let out. And when the opportunity presents itself, I think unfortunately many of them are going to go back to the lives that they've lived all their lives, and that's criminal life. As it relates to tensions between mayors and police, I was in that business for 50 years. Every agency I ever worked for, there were tensions between police, police unions, mayors, police chiefs, police commissioners. It's just part of that world that goes on, usually revolves around contracts and personalities. And so New York is not much different in many respects than what I've seen play out over 50 years in American policing.

The good news is, with rare exception, when our officers take inappropriate actions such as slow downs or work stoppages, they go out and do their jobs during the crises. They go out and do their jobs despite their personal feelings toward their police chief or their mayor or their governor. And we can all be thankful for that, that what calls them to the profession in the first place is what continues to motivate them even once they're in the profession and all the issues that they face once they're in that profession. Michael?

Chief Michael Downing:

Just that, as Chief Bratton taught me, the crisis always brings danger and opportunity. And we know what the danger is because we see it day, but there is great opportunity for policing right now to reset, get ready for the summer and look at it in a good light. And I think they're continuing to build relationships and they're looking good out in the streets, and I think that's the opportunity that they can take advantage of right now.

Commissioner Bill Bratton:

As you can tell, Michael and I are eternal optimists. And that's good because in a profession that breeds cynicism and pessimism, you need a lot of optimists.

John Walters:

Well, thank you both. Thank you both for your great service to the country, the cities you've served and examples you've been for law enforcement throughout the country and continue to be. And thank you for giving us some time and benefit of your expertise and current insight about what's going on around the country. This has been great and I appreciate it. And I hope you also, as you continue those conversations, convey our best wishes to those on the front line, including chiefs you've talked about who are sick with the virus and still commanding their departments. So that's a great example. Thank you both. And thank you. Thank you those who listened to the call.