



The Ross Retort

by Lisa Ross

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San Diego Tells Junkies to “Come On Down” for Clean Needles

Calling all intravenous drug addicts—the City of San Diego invites you down to mid-city to trade in your old needles, two at a time, for clean needles and syringes so that your current out of control disease does not bring you and the people you have casual sex with two worse deadly diseases, AIDS and Hepatitis C.

And, this program is brought to you in part through the efforts of the San Diego Police Officers Association who ironically argued as vigorously against the pilot program approved this week by the San Diego City Council as they did to get these people elected.

In fact, during the last election cycle, the POA joined other public employee unions to canonize candidates early in the primary process, a key factor in the successful election of all five council members who voted for the needle exchange program.

Toni Atkins, Ralph Inzunza, Donna Frye and Scott Peters never hid their support of needle exchange programs during their campaigns. Neither did they hide their undying support for benefits and salaries, which apparently ruled the day. The surprise was quixotic conservative Byron Wear who let arguments from the medical establishment top the cops.

As approved this week by the San Diego City Council, a 21st Century Good Humor Man in his truck, a mobile home funded by Alliance Healthcare Foundation, will troll the streets of select inner city communities seeking addicts, I mean clients, far away from the homes and neighborhoods of the Council members who voted for this pilot program while San Diego’s police officers must stand off and watch.

In what must have been intended as reassurance to these host communities, the mobile needle distribution center is required to land at least three blocks from any school so that kids don’t have to watch the government condoned spectacle from their classrooms, only on their way to and from school.

The “pilot” program was vigorously opposed by law enforcement because these folks deal daily with intravenous methamphetamine and heroine addicts, a street level reality that clashes with the dewey-eyed religious allegiance some

proponents of needle exchange programs maintain, even in the face of conflicting evidence regarding the benefits to public health and the vision of medical personnel placing suicide delivery systems in the hands of people who maintain a determined self destructive life-style.

The cops also have a hard time with the unequal protection under the law now afforded to people breaking the law as long as the activity occurs to, from, and in the mobile needle distribution center. Apparently, obtaining and possessing enough syringes and needles to keep the dream alive for a week of miserable ecstasy is OK if obtained from a government-sanctioned program.

Most of all, they know that the word “pilot” attached to this “program” is just a palliative for a jumpy and conflicted electorate whose hearts bleed for the sick and downtrodden, but whose brains worry that maybe the police understand that the very oxymoronic thinking that assumed a junkie could responsibly use this program will be unable to see indications of the program’s failure.

Besides, when was the last time a politician owned up to a monumental public policy “goof” and changed course? I suppose an intrepid but responsible Council Member could take the “State Senator Steve Peace defense” to get us out of this.

Mr. Peace, the crafter of California’s energy deregulation legislation, might devise an explanation that would go something like “the needle exchange idea was great, but the darned non-profit screwed it up—if City Government had administered the program, we would have done it right, but our voters wouldn’t pay for that.” Blaming the victims is always good and fits well with the subject at hand.

As these things go, more than likely clean needle exchange programs in San Diego will burgeon into a growth industry, replete with the requisite lobbyists and PR flaks.

Let us hope that law enforcement officials, including District Attorney Paul Pfingst and Police Chief David Bejerano, and the County Health Department, are dead wrong on the issue—that the incidence of AIDS and Hepatitis will decrease enough justify this strange and dark business.