



## The Birmingham News

### An ounce of prevention

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THE ISSUE: Attorney General Troy King criticized his opponent's ideas about preventing crime, calling them "social programs" rather than law enforcement. King shouldn't dismiss the best and least expensive ways to fight crime.

Imagine a public health leader who sees her job as treating diseases, not preventing them. A preacher who believes it's his job to condemn us when we sin, not to encourage us to adhere to paths of righteousness. An auto mechanic who sees the frayed belt but doesn't do anything to avert the inevitable breakdown.

Then you see the problem with Attorney General Troy King's approach to law enforcement.

King clearly believes it's the attorney general's job to fight crime. He's less interested in fighting crime through programs designed to keep it from happening in the first place.

King's challenger, Mobile District Attorney John Tyson, bases his campaign in part on the idea of preventing crime, touting programs like one in his office that intervenes and tries to save kids who get into serious trouble at school. The idea is to get children and their families plugged into agencies that address addiction, mental illness and other problems before more serious criminal problems arise.

King's response?

"That's a great program for a social worker to run," he said. "That's not the kind of program the attorney general of Alabama should run."

Granted, Tyson is gunning for King's job. King would be an unusual candidate if he championed his opponent's platform. The attorney general acknowledges that some crime-prevention efforts are worthwhile. Still, it's disheartening that King considers creative attempts to fight crime on the front end to be a sideshow to real law enforcement.

Yes, serious crimes must be vigorously prosecuted and punished. The attorney general definitely has a role to play in that. But the attorney general should also be keenly interested in interventions that can steer people away from lives of crime. That's not being soft on crime. It's being smart on crime.

Alabamians have learned too well that we can spend a little money upfront to prevent crime - or we can pay a lot of money after the fact to punish crime. When possible, it's far better to salvage potential criminals, to spare potential victims and to save taxpayers' money.

Tyson's approach may not be the best. Without a doubt, it's not perfect. No program run by humans is. But at least it acknowledges the real truth behind the old saying. An ounce of prevention really is worth a pound of cure.

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