



Op-ed: As Mike Royko's son, I still feel the need to be a voice for Chicagoans and a safer, more vibrant city

By Sam Royko

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The sun rises over the Chicago skyline as the clouds slowly break, seen near the city's Austin area. (Antonio Perez / Chicago Tribune)

Chicago journalist Ben Joravsky called me a “son of Chicago,” and I am. Inside and out. A love for this city is part of my heritage. My father, Mike Royko, served as a voice for Chicagoans through his newspaper column for 30-plus years. We lost his voice 24 years ago. I still feel the need for that

voice for Chicagoans. Someone to speak out and speak up for all of us. This obligation was most clear when my girlfriend was one of the more than 1,400 carjacking victims in our city this year.

In January, my girlfriend took my car to drop off a wedding present in the heart of Wicker Park. It was 2 p.m. on a sunny, but still cold, Saturday afternoon. I was on the phone with my mother, bemoaning my beloved Bears' loss to the Saints, when my phone started buzzing.

It was a number I did not recognize. I thought it was spam. When I got a second call from the same number, I answered and was shocked to hear, "Your girlfriend was just carjacked! She's physically OK but very shaken up." I called my neighbor, who was kind enough to drive me over and wait with us, and I spent the next hour hearing all the details of her terrifying experience.

Since then, I have sought to help others who are carjacking victims and advocate for understanding these incidents. As a lawyer, I prepared by gathering information on the issue to become more informed. I reached out to my local elected leaders. I raised my voice to create awareness of public safety issues and long-standing systemic problems in the city. I also created the [Greater West Town Community Coalition](#) on Facebook.

The GWTCC is a place for open discussion on the tough issues facing our community. Our goal is to find compromises that create change and work toward solutions. We organized a collective voice on public safety and ward redistricting in collaboration with nine other neighborhood organizations in West Town.

This work matters. We already can see a better West Town community and a better Chicago. But it doesn't end there. Our public officials need to take a new approach to aiding and supporting our communities and transforming our institutions.

One way to support neighborhoods is to keep that area together in one ward, thus fostering their ability to advocate for themselves. We can build a better West Town more effectively if we are in as few wards as possible.

Like all Chicagoans, we want a safer city for everybody. One in which public officials take a collaborative approach, communicate clearly and share data for crime reduction and neighborhood development. We want targeted investment in historically disenfranchised communities and effective

diversion programs that connect young people with the support they need. The city needs appropriate consequences for people who commit carjackings and similar crimes, but there should also be ample opportunities for redemption.

We need to end finger-pointing and demand cooperation. We need greater transparency from our public officials. They need to talk to people in every neighborhood to see what they need and meet those needs.

To even begin to enact these solutions, we need to address the obtuse, divisive and ultimately ineffective nature of our current political culture. Data is expensive and time-consuming to gather. We need elected officials and government offices to share that data with one another and with the public. Knowledge is power when it comes to solving complex community problems.

Chicagoans need elected officials to work together to make public information readily accessible to provide transparency and hold our public institutions accountable. This information should be scrutinized by our elected officials, experts in the field, the media and everyday residents. The new [Violence Reduction Dashboard](#), which analyzes data from the Chicago Police Department, appears to be a step in the right direction. However, solutions cannot be created with only one piece of the puzzle.

Leaders need to put aside their differences and work together. There must be communication and collaboration between the aldermen, the mayor's office, CPD, the Cook County state's attorney's office and the courts. But this must go a step further, and there must be open communication among these groups, the community and the media. Dialogue all across the city and from grassroots up to the top of the governmental food chain is key.

Perhaps then, collaboratively, we will be able to truly develop a comprehensive plan for crime prevention and community building. The current system is broken. Chicagoans demand better. We deserve better. I think it is worth working together to fix it. Let's go.

Sam Royko manages The Royko Group, a commercial law firm. He is the son of Mike Royko, the late Chicago Tribune columnist.

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