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'We're Going to Turn These Streets Up, Cut These Punks Off at the Knees,' Police Commissioner Vows Following Shooting Death of Innocent Woman

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VIPD Officers cordone off a road separating Peter's Rest from Castle Coakley, following a shooting incident that occurred just after 8:00 a.m. on Thursday, Jan. 27, 2021. By. V.I. CONSORTIUM

ST. CROIX — V.I. Police Commissioner Ray Martinez was forceful in his vow to take on criminals who have disrupted and ended the lives of residents, the latest being a 46-year-old woman who was preparing to head out to her job when she was struck and killed by a stray bullet while in her bedroom by a window.

In stark contrast to his predecessors, Mr. Martinez, speaking during a V.I.P.D. press briefing to address the death of Stacie Schjang, took responsibility for what he said was the department's failure to protect the community. He then committed to do better, and spoke directly to Virgin Islanders as if he were one-on-one with residents. The commissioner called perpetrators of crimes punks, said the V.I.P.D. would "turn up these streets up," including the turfs, and further asserted that it was high time that criminals were cut down at the knees.

"This morning at approximately 8:10 a.m., a young lady lost her life. An innocent young lady lost her life when a stray bullet entered her bedroom and took her life. One bullet. She had nothing to do with this shooting incident this morning," Mr. Martinez said. He said he had an opportunity to visit the family of the deceased, "but what do I say. What can any of us say to that family, to her loved ones, to her friends, her coworkers. Nothing. We offer condolences, but there's nothing that we can truly say because there's nothing that can bring her back."

"Folks, this has to stop. It must stop," the commissioner said while taking responsibility for today's incident and those before it under his tenure. "I stand before you today and tell you that I accept responsibility for the failures of my police department, for the failures of our community, because I run the department that is responsible for safeguarding our community, our territory. And today, and last week, and the week before and going back until July 13 [2021] when I first took this job, I've not been able to safeguard this community to the level that is owed to you."

"So I'll tell you what, I've got a whole different mindset right now, and the mindset is that of shaking things up. So here's what's going to happen. This is a message not to our citizens who do the right thing. It's a very simple message to the guys and girls out here who choose to be on the wrong side of the law. We are coming to get you. We are going to start kicking in more doors, we're going to start stopping more vehicles. The tints, the smallest of incidents, we are coming for you. Because it's quite clear to me at least that that's where we start. These individuals that we've had on our watch list, yes, we're going to increase what we do," the commissioner said.

Mr. Martinez said the V.I.P.D. has been doing its best, confiscating illegal firearms, making "countless" arrests, however, "it hasn't slowed down anything. We still have folks at 8:10 in the morning taking their kids to school, folks on their way to work, and we have guys who choose to open fire on another vehicle — 8:10 a.m.

He spoke of the incident on Jan. 17 that resulted in [the shooting deaths of two 17-year-old males](#) in Castle Coakley, and said, "I accept responsibility for what we haven't done, and pledge to my community that the V.I.P.D., our chiefs, our executives, our detectives are going to hit the streets. We're going to turn these streets up. We're going to turn these turfs — if you're on the turfs, I'm telling you don't be out there."

The commissioner said the actions of the criminals show that they have no fear of police and no respect for the community.

St. Croix Police Chief Sean Santos, visibly angered by the incident, echoed the commissioner's stance. "I get my marching orders from the commissioner, so we're going to go out there and do what we have to do. You have tinted windshields, you're getting stopped. You're either going to get ticketed or your car is going to get towed. You're driving around here on these ATVs, we're taking it. There's no more. The broken windows theory, we're going to come back with it," the chief said.

The broken windows theory is a criminological theory that states that visible signs of crime, anti-social behavior, and civil disorder create an urban environment that encourages further crime and

disorder, including serious crimes, according to a description of the theory.

"Apparently this is what needs to be done in order to stop this. We've been having too much of these senseless killings from last year to this year. Enough is enough. You guys don't want to act right, then that's it. So if you're out here in these parking lots loitering, we coming, tinted windshield, if we could tow your car if it's within the law, we're doing it. Enough is enough now."

Ms. Schjang was pronounced dead Thursday morning after a stray bullet from a shooting on the road separating Peter's Rest from Castle Coakley, just south of the El Sol Bar and Restaurant entered her home and struck her in the upper body while she was in her room near a window, according to the police department.

V.I.P.D. Communications Director Glen Dratte said the 911 Emergency Call Center received a call from a concerned resident at about 7:45 a.m. reporting discharging of shots in the Castle Coakley area. A second call came in at about 8:10 a.m. reporting discharging of shots in the same area. The 911 Emergency Call Center then received a third call at about 8:12 a.m., this time from a family member of a female victim, who said the victim was found in her home with a single gunshot wound to the upper body.

V.I.P.D. officers and Emergency Medical Technicians responded to the scene, where the victim was pronounced dead on arrival.

During the press briefing, Police Commander Lt. Naomi Joseph said there were two vehicles in the Castle Coakley area, including a white car whose occupant or occupants were shooting at a brown vehicle at the front. "We need help identifying the occupants of the vehicle and the vehicle itself. So I'm asking you, if you were on the route in Castle Coakley or you were on Peter's Rest Road, or Queen Mary Highway whether east or west from the Sion Farm intersection, we need footage from eight o'clock this morning down to 8:30 a.m. so we can see who, what, what they were wearing, who they were — we need help," Comdr. Joseph said.

Mr. Martinez, who flew to St. Croix from St. Thomas this morning following the homicide, visited with the Schjang family before the press briefing. Asked by the Consortium to relay to the public his experience visiting with grieving family members, the commissioner said he oftentimes experience hurt. "There's nothing that you can truly tell a family that is grieving for the sudden loss of a loved one, especially a loved one whose life is taken senselessly from them for pure ignorance," a visibly emotional Martinez said.

Putting aside political correctness, the commissioner chided the perpetrators of violent crimes, stating, "These bunch of punks on our streets that continue to carry out these acts, it's high time that we cut them off at the knees."