The Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce is the voice of business in L.A. County. Founded in 1888, the Chamber promotes a prosperous economy and quality of life in the Los Angeles region. For more information, visit www.lachamber.org.

350 S. Bixel St.
Los Angeles, CA 90017
213.580.7500 tel
213.580.7511 fax
info@lachamber.org

THE BUSINESS PERSPECTIVE:
To Protect and to Serve For Five More Years

by Gary Toebben, President & CEO, Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce

Later this month the Los Angeles Police Commission will decide whether to reappoint Chief William Bratton for another five years as the city’s top cop. The L.A. Area Chamber strongly supports his reappointment to another five-year term.

Chief Bratton was hired as the Los Angeles Police Department chief in late 2002. His resume included leading both the Boston and New York City police departments but he faced significant challenges when he arrived—inhaling a department subject to a federal consent decree, rising gang crime, the threat of terrorism and a hiring freeze that kept the force from expanding.

During his first few months on the job, Bratton’s response to these problems was indicative of his leadership since that time—bold, outspoken and results-oriented. Based on the response at a public hearing on his reappointment last night, the residents of L.A. appreciate his style of leadership and the results.

Bratton immediately went to work reorganizing the LAPD command staff to increase transparency and foster an environment that would not permit a repeat Rampart scandal. And the department is nearing full compliance of the federal consent decree. His commitment to fulfilling the decree is moving the LAPD forward from the divisive scandals of the 1990s.

Crime numbers have fallen. Serious crimes are down 29 percent and homicides are down 19 percent compared to 2001. Some credit these figures to a nationwide drop in violent crime, but the tone and tenor of the LAPD under Bratton’s leadership has undoubtedly played a key role. Bratton implemented a computer program that tracks crime hot spots and helps the department better respond to new flare ups.

More recently, Bratton joined L.A. Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa to focus attention and resources on combating gang violence in L.A. Bratton’s “broken windows” approach stemming from his days in New York City has caught on here. It focuses efforts on fixing problems when they are small, such as a broken window, before they fester into major criminal problems. The approach is being used not only by the LAPD, but in neighborhoods throughout L.A. to clean up blighted areas and send a message to criminals that their activity will not be tolerated.

Through it all, Bratton and the entire department have made these great strides with a limited number of officers. With 9,428 officers, the LAPD is famously understaffed compared to other major cities. New York City has one officer for every 228 residents, while Chicago’s ratio is one officer per 216 citizens. The LAPD has one officer for every 426 residents—a situation exacerbated by the sheer geographic size of our city. Since taking the helm, Bratton has worked with the L.A. City Council and Mayor Villaraigosa to add nearly 500 new officers with the goal of reaching 10,000 strong by next year.

Much more remains to be done with gang crime, which is still a major problem in too many neighborhoods. Bratton, the City Council and the mayor must continue to partner on developing a new, comprehensive strategy to reduce gang violence and gang membership as suggested by Connie Rice, co-director of the Advancement Project. Wholesale change should not only focus on suppression, but also intervention and most importantly, prevention. It requires a sustained political, law enforcement and community commitment for which we are all responsible.

Bratton must keep building bridges in the African-American and Latino communities where distrust of the LAPD runs high. This includes completing the reforms mandated by the consent decree and working with residents and community leaders on the underlying problems in their individual neighborhoods. Mending these wounds takes time, but it must be a cornerstone of all the department’s efforts.

Our Chamber and the L.A. business community have had a strong partnership with Chief Bratton since he came to L.A. His ability to engage all parts of our city in discussions and actions is vital to making L.A. the safest big city in the country. We stand behind him for another five years.

And that’s The Business Perspective.
The Business Perspective is a weekly opinion piece by Gary Toebben, President & CEO of the Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce, produced with the input of Senior Policy Advisor Rusty Hammer.