

Fresno DA: 'Everyone got bamboozled with Prop. 47'

Published on 04/03/2015 - 11:28 am

Written by George Lurie

[13 Comments](#)



Lisa Smittcamp speaks at the Fresno Chamber's "Eggs & Issues" event April 3. Photo courtesy of the Fresno Chamber of Commerce. Fresno County's new top prosecutor, Lisa A. Smittcamp, addressed area business leaders this morning at the Greater Fresno Area Chamber of Commerce's "Eggs & Issues" breakfast.

Smittcamp was elected district attorney this past November, handily defeating three-term incumbent Elizabeth Egan with the help of high-profile endorsements from Mayor Ashley Swearengin and the Fresno Police Officers' Association.

A Valley native and graduate of San Joaquin Memorial High, Smittcamp earned a bachelor's degree in English from U.S.C. and her law degree from San Joaquin College of Law.

She has been with the D.A.'s office since 2001 and now manages 275 employees, including more than 100 lawyers, and a \$40 million dollar annual budget.

During an hour-long speech Friday morning, she delivered a high-energy, mostly upbeat message to more than 100 chamber members and guests.

"I'm just a girl from northwest Fresno," Smittcamp began. "I was born and raised here and I love this community. And it just breaks my heart when bad things happen here."

Smittcamp said she decided to pursue a career in law while still a little girl.

"This dates me but I was actually inspired by the old TV show Perry Mason," she said. "Before I even went to school,

stayed at home with my grandmother and we would watch the show on an old black-and-white television.”

“Honestly, I thought Perry Mason was a bad ass. He was cool. He won every case. I wanted to be him,” Smittcamp said.

Just three months into her four-year term, Smittcamp believes morale in the D.A.’s office is already improving.

“People around the office are sparkling,” Smittcamp said. “We are thriving. Folks are staying way past 5 o’clock and putting in the extra hours because they see their work is appreciated.”

“As the economy improves, we are hoping to increase our budget,” she said, adding that she also hopes to increase the starting salaries for prosecutors joining her office.

“Right now, they are making \$47,000 a year. Their caseloads are tremendous. And they can’t live on those salaries.”

In 2014, Smittcamp said the D.A.’s office filed more than 7,000 felony cases.

Recent voter approval of Proposition 47, she said, “is the biggest thing impacting the criminal justice system today.”

“Everybody got bamboozled with Prop 47,” Smittcamp said. “It’s not working out.”

Proposition 47, passed by California voters in 2014, reduces penalties for some crimes, especially lower-level drug offenses.

Smittcamp, who mentioned that her brother “has struggled with drug addiction,” believes felony convictions for drug offenders “act as incentives” to help them turn their lives around.

But instead of being incarcerated after their arrests, she said many drug offenders are being released back on to the streets.

“Addicts, looking for a fix, are the ones breaking into your cars, stealing your mail, robbing your homes,” Smittcamp told the Chamber audience.

Since Proposition 47’s passage, she added, “now we give our addicts and abusers a little ticket to come to court” and many do not even show up for their court appearance.

Smittcamp said her office continues to work with area law enforcement officials “to keep people in jail.”

Fresno’s “worst” problem, Smittcamp said, “continues to be drugs.”

“Believe it or not,” she added, “heroin is the drug of choice” amongst the city’s youth.

“Heroin is available on every high school campus in the city,” she said, adding that young addicts begin by taking their parents’ Vicodin and then progress to Oxycontin and heroin.

People with drug problems “fuel and initiate” much of the city’s crime, the D.A. reported. “And drugs are the way gangs make money... Until we conquer the drug problem, we’re not going anywhere.”

Smittcamp said fighting gang activity also remains a top priority in her office. “These gangs are smart. They have hierarchies. They know how to make money. They sell [stolen] cars and car parts and are now trafficking women.”

In her wide-ranging speech, Smittcamp blasted “liberal Bay Area judges” for preventing California from carrying out death penalty sentences.

She said she also opposes efforts to legalize recreational marijuana in California. “It’s not working in Colorado. The number of people being arrested for driving under the influence there has increased by more than 100 percent.”

“Legalizing marijuana here will only make our problems worse,” Smittcamp said. “I think it’s a really bad idea.”

She also expressed displeasure with “some of the parole releases going on right now,” which she characterized as “really frightening.”

And before closing, she said her office continues to “aggressively pursue” white-collar crime.

“We’re doing a lot of identity theft prosecutions,” she said. “It doesn’t make the 6 o’clock news but it’s a big part of what we do.”

Smittcamp, a mother of two school-age children, has made truancy prevention another top priority, assigning one member of her staff full-time to the issue.

“We’ve got to get kids in school and keep them there so they can learn. Otherwise, when they are 18, they end up [dealing with] my office,” she said. “Educating the city’s children is the real key to Fresno’s future.”

[inShare1](#)