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## Traffic tickets often detrimental as enforcement strategy

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A March 6 news story, "Road dog is a ticket-writing machine," was revealing, but not for the reasons heralded by the State Patrol trooper featured in The World-Herald. The article recounted the trooper's efforts and antics writing traffic tickets at the intersection of 30th Street and Ames Avenue in a positive, almost lighthearted, way. That is not at all the way most people in north Omaha feel upon receiving those tickets. When the State Patrol, or more often, the Omaha Police Department, conducts this type of traffic enforcement in minority communities, these tickets take on a much more sinister and detrimental effect.

The idea that law enforcement will blanket a community with traffic enforcement in response to an increase in gun violence, for instance, is a woefully outdated enforcement strategy. In the past, this type of selective enforcement (also known as "racial profiling") has led to an outpouring of complaint.

The problem with using these so-called "pretext" traffic stops to pull over as many people as possible to check for guns and contraband is that law enforcement invariably pulls many good, hardworking people into its dragnet.

The more people stopped, the more the law enforcement agency criminalizes the entire neighborhood. This type of failed strategy is misguided for two reasons.

First, these traffic stops are enormously expensive to citizens. In the case cited in the article, the young man was pulled over for an expired plate, hardly a serious offense. In addition, he was told he had an outstanding traffic warrant.

OPD and our courts are so outdated that they do not have effective technology. There are upward of 20,000 outstanding warrants in

Omaha, and many of them, like this one, are incorrect. Had this man been detained further or booked and his car towed, this ticket may have cost him his job had he been on his way to work, or he may have lost his car, as the impound fees are prohibitive.

Another cost is incurred if the police use an unlawful reason to stop or search him. He would have to hire a lawyer to fight his case but still risks having a conviction on his record, further complicating his employment prospects.

What's more, these stops rarely produce any arrests or contraband. Not long ago, The World-Herald reported that the State Patrol "helped out" with traffic enforcement in north Omaha and, in more than 250 stops, about three cases yielded any contraband.

Lastly, and most importantly, the social cost of these tickets is high compared with the low enforcement productivity. And, if law enforcement officials need any explanation for why many people in north Omaha are reluctant to cooperate with crime-solving, they need only look at how they treat the community - and these types of stops are a perfect example.

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