

# A deal is a deal

**V**IOLENT CRIME IS up in Montgomery County. In fact, even if you don't count the six sniper murders (which are rightly classified as an aberration), the county's homicide rate still increased a whopping 37 percent between 2001 and 2002, according to the latest available statistics.

Other serious crime on the rise includes auto theft (up 18 percent), rape (up 15 percent), burglary (up 9.5 percent) robbery (up 7 percent), aggravated assault (up 6 percent) and larceny (up almost 4 percent).

But since other, more frequent crimes such as arson, vandalism and prostitution were down during the same period, they average out to a misleading 4 percent drop in total crime, which County Executive Douglas M. Duncan claims is "good news."

This may be good news to Duncan, but will be of little comfort to Montgomery residents facing higher odds of being murdered, robbed or raped, or of having their car stolen (instead of, say, finding the tires slashed).

So the county's police officers — who worked around-the-clock during the sniper crisis, performing admirably by all accounts — have a lot more dangerous work to do, but the County Council apparently is expecting them to do it for less.

Indeed, the council is considering renegeing on a modest 2 percent cost-of-living raise that already has been negotiated into the police contract, even though, just last year, eight council members voted their own successors a much more generous 7 percent pay hike.

"A deal is a deal, and a contract is a contract," District 1 Councilman Howard Denis (the only one to vote against the council raise) told *The Journal*.

We agree. Montgomery police officers have earned what is in reality a token reward. Besides, tampering with the current contract will force renegotiation with the Fraternal Order of Police, an expense the county can ill afford.

If somebody has to live without a pay raise, let it be the County Council members themselves, and not the "thin blue line" that protects them — and everybody else — from harm.

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