2/4/2016

116th KZGN News Talking Points Editorial

By: Tom Wiknich

The city council needs to get angry and fight the sheriff’s decision to close the Ridgecrest jail. Our safety is at risk?

As I reported earlier, the Kern County sheriff and the board of supervisors have approved Sheriff Youngblood’s decision to close the jail in Ridgecrest. I want to emphatically state, that this editorial is not directed to any of the fine officers and deputies that work here. This critical editorial is against Sheriff Youngblood and Supervisor Gleason support of the sheriff’s decision.

Here’s a recap of the sheriff’s announcement. The Ridgecrest jail will be closed and all detentions staff will be reassigned to the Lerdo facilities to fill funded vacancies. This jail closure will eliminate booking and housing services in the northeast area of our county.  This will affect the Kern County sheriff’s office and allied agencies ability to book prisoners in Ridgecrest.  Deputies and allied agencies’ officers will be required to transport their arrestees to the Mojave jail.  This will cause the arresting officers to be out of their jurisdictions for increased periods when transporting and booking prisoners at the Mojave jail. That was the announcement from our sheriff. Note the most important part of the press release: Deputies and allied agencies’ officers will be required to transport their arrestees to the Mojave jail.  This will cause the arresting officers to be out of their jurisdictions for increased periods when transporting and booking prisoners at the Mojave jail. This cut is the only cut proposed by the sheriff that will result in that impact. No other agency will have to take officers off the streets to travel 3 hours to book prisoners, thereby removing that officer from the city he is there to provide service to.

I won’t even get into the cost factor. There will be a huge cost impact to the city. I brought this up at last night’s council meeting. I was not impressed with the council’s soft expressions of concern of the issue. The mayor and Sanders said they want time to understand the details of the decision and not to make any knee-jerk reactions. Mower and Thomas did offer some soft concern about the decision. I’m appalled at these comments.

I know they are thinking politically to try and not stir up problems between the county and the city. But I say, come on. The county made a decision that puts all of our lives at risk with about a 2-week warning to, we, the people. The county made a decision that does not support their concern for our safety. It shows a poor evaluation to the people of the Indian Wells Valley. First, let’s handle the spin points the sheriff and our supervisor Gleason will use to support this decision. They will point out that every area of the county needs to share in the hard times. Conceptually, I agree. Only one other of the proposed cuts will immediately affect the safety of the people they are supposed to protect and serve.

The other life threatening cut that will affect people is the removal of the deputy in Boron. That cut will reduce coverage in that area of the county. Locally, the decision to close the jail here affects every person in the valleys safety. The impact of the cut here means that our local police officers and deputies will no longer have the convenience to book prisoners here in Ridgecrest. All arrests will have to be booked into the Mojave jail. This decision puts everyone’s safety at risk in the whole Indian Wells Valley. Chief Strand said that the decision will probably equal 2 police officers per year lost from providing the people of Ridgecrest with adequate police support. He said: at best, a round trip booking trip to Mojave equals the loss of 3 hours of an officer on our streets. At times when we may only have 2 or three patrol officers on duty at a time, losing one of them to be out of the valley entirely is not right. It puts all of us at risk.

Our lives matter. Officers’ lives matter. At the end of the meeting, when the council was commenting on the issue, Sanders said he doesn’t know what to do! In frustration, I called out to them to fight this decision. Do they not get why Trump has so much support? The people are angry at politicians not fighting for us, and putting us first over their political careers. Attention council: you need to fight this decision. You should not accept the life threatening decisions. You should tell supervisor Gleason and sheriff Youngblood that this decision is not equal across the county. It may be financially equal, but it sure isn’t equal when it comes to public safety. Should there be cuts here? Sure, but not a cut that affects our lives directly.

Now a short comment on the supposed cost savings. In the press release, the sheriff states this: All detentions staff will be reassigned to the Lerdo facilities to fill funded vacancies.

My response is this: If there are unfilled funded positions at the Lerdo facility, how about just moving those unfilled, funded positions back here? If you’ve been operating with those open funded positions, removing the people from here isn’t even saving any real money. The same people will still be on the payroll, and costing county money. Truth be told, almost every cut the sheriff made resulted in moving deputies from one filled position to other unfilled funded positions, and deleting currently filled positions. Why not just decided to leave those unfilled funded positions, unfilled, and unfund them? That would generate the same cost savings and not make life threatening decisions. This is purely a shell game. Move people around and show cost savings that aren’t real. How stupid do they think we the people are? It appears the sheriff has wanted to close the Ridgecrest facility for some time. Now he has a supposed reason to do it. Well, Sheriff, you have taken and oath to protect and serve the people of the whole county. These decisions do not fulfill that oath. To you supervisor Gleason, these cuts save no real money. We are smart enough to see that. When you move funded people to other funded positions, and then delete that other position, nothing is really saved. You cut a position, but spending really didn’t go away. However, the decision puts all of our lives at risk. Our lives will be at more risk. Police officers lives will be at more risk. Deputies’ lives will be at more risk. To you viewers, don’t stand for this. Let the mayor and council you expect them to do their job to fight for our right of protection. Don’t sit by and let supervisor Gleason and sheriff Youngblood put our lives at risk. Let them know the decision is not acceptable.

In conclusion, hey city council, let’s see some real representation.

Let’s see some real concern for our lives. This decision is not appropriate. Our lives matter. Police lives matter. Step up and express some anger, and fight against this jail closure.

I’m Tom Wiknich, and that’s what I think. I’d like to know what you think. If you have any comments about this editorial, or would like to discuss or recommend a topic, I’d like to hear from you. Please email them to info@kzgn.net.