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140th KZGN News Talking Points Editorial

By Tom Wiknich

Public safety: Is anyone doing anything to stop the local jail from closure?

First, a couple comments from my last editorial titled: What were your thoughts on Wednesday night’s council town hall meeting?

Karen provided these comments, “I am interested in knowing if there is an overall type of people who keep running off potential businesses. Also, when I worked on-base, the #1 question the new hires asked me is ‘what do you do around here?’ I could only suggest places out of town (including the casino in Bishop). Many of these people left town every weekend. And lastly, it’s not fair or feasible to stop a business from coming here because of moral reasons, as not everyone believes the same. That's why we have government laws and city ordinances. I personally think using personal morality as a reason to stop a business should never be considered.” Karen closed with this, “Your write-up is excellent and answered a few questions I’ve had for a while.” Thanks for your comments, Karen.

I’ll answer your questions as best I can. First, I know of no organized group that fights growth of the city; however, I do know that there are some people that do not want to see any growth. That is their right. As one that has been in office before, most of the time projects are proposed that some object to, it is a group of people with common interests that get together to object to a certain issue. There is little organization between them unless there is a topic that brings them together. As far as base recruitment, and the issue for: what is there to do here? I, too, was involved in recruitment at times when I worked on the base. I, too, had to be clever in how to talk about Ridgecrest and its surrounding areas for entertainment. By clever, I meant that I was honest and provided all the advantages to a small town and the surrounding available activities, within about a three hour drive, such as skiing in mammoth, high-country hiking in the summer, off-road four wheeling, Death Valley, camping along the mighty Kern River, and all sorts of outdoor activities. If a person likes outdoor activities, this is a great place to live and raise a family. Often I was asked about how far we are from Las Vegas, for all the entertainment they have available.

Now, today’s important topic: Public safety--Is anyone doing anything to stop the local jail from closure?

While lots of people are arguing about a new casino, let’s remember that the Kern County sheriff is still planning to close the Ridgecrest jail. This decision will impact Ridgecrest like no other city in the county. Once again, we are the step children of Kern County, and it appears no one is flexing any political muscle to stop it. I repeat, it appears none of our elected officials are doing anything to stop this outrageous decision. It is reported that sheriff Youngblood has told the city to put up $300,000 or the jail will be closed. This is extortion. Our supervisor appears to be doing nothing to stop it. I asked Mick Gleason some time ago what can be done. In a nut shell, he told me there is little he can do except to return the money cut. He said the sheriff is an independent agency. He can allocate funds as he sees fit.

If I were the supervisor, I would let the sheriff know that I would not accept the draconian cuts he has recommended concerning public safety sacrificed in my district. I would let him know that I will be talking to every paper, radio and TV station in the county telling the people about this public safety risk decision. If he doesn’t reinstate the jail, I would advocate hitting his department another million dollars for every year the jail is closed and the sheriff continues to endanger the public safety for the people of Ridgecrest and the Indian Wells Valley. If the people have to take a hit that is unmatched by any other city in kern county, then, I would advocate for cuts that will be shared by the other cities in the county.

Again, the fact of this is clear. No other city in Kern County will have their actual level of officers on the street affected like Ridgecrest will. No other city in Kern County will actually lose officers from their streets, almost daily, like Ridgecrest will get hit. This is all in a shift of funded jail positions here, to other unfunded positions in Bakersfield. Netting, no real cost savings. None, just a shift of positions from here to there. This is purely outrageous. It will have a significant cost to us, but beyond the cost impact is ours and police officers’ safety. We usually have 2-3 officers and a watch commander sergeant available for handling calls for service. We arrest over 1,000 prisoners per year. Do you realize there are only 365 days in a year? On average, we may arrest 3 people per day.

With regard to today’s editorial topic, what is being done about this? I hear nothing from supervisor Gleason fighting this. I hear nothing of our mayor or city council fighting this. Are all our elected officials just rolling over and surrendering to the sheriff? Is our mayor and city council so concerned about politics that they are not willing to publicly fight against this terrible decision? Where’s the newspaper headline saying: “Mayor Breeden criticizes Sheriff Youngblood decision!”? Where’s the TV news interview of the mayor or any council member voicing their displeasure with the cuts? For the record, I know sheriff Youngblood. I like what he’s done as our sheriff. I like him as a good person. But, Donny, I have to disagree with you on this one. With all due respect, I implore you to reconsider this decision. None of the cuts you have proposed has resulted in any other city in Kern County having to loose officer support for hour’s every day. You appear to have singled out Ridgecrest and your own officers serving in the Indian Wells Valley. Why? I agree that all areas need to share in the cuts your office has to eat as a result of the supervisors’ decision, but affecting the number of officers we have on the street is not an appropriate cut. I know Chief Strand is making plans on how to deal with this problem, but the plan will still affect our safety and budget. We shouldn’t accept this quietly.

In conclusion, hey supervisor Gleason. Hey Mayor Breeden. Hey council members Sanders, Acton, Thomas, and Mower. Where are you folks? What are you doing to fight this closure? Back in February, I stood at the podium, with hundreds of others, telling the sheriff this decision is wrong. I haven’t seen any of you join the fight publically. Are you fighting for our safety, or not?

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.