2/9/2016
117th KZGN News Talking Points Editorial
By: Tom Wiknich

The city council questions the sheriff’s decision to close the Ridgecrest jail Wednesday evening at city hall. Is our safety at risk?

As I reported earlier, the Kern County Sheriff Youngblood has decided 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 who work there. This critical editorial is against Sheriff Youngblood’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.

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. The truth is that the police estimate that about half of the prisoners will not be accepted at the Mojave jail, and then have to be transported further to Bakersfield for booking. 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 or more to book prisoners, thereby removing that officer from the city he/she is there to provide service to.

There will be a huge cost impact to the city. It is likely that overtime costs will surely go up, and then there is the officer fatigue factor, with a lot of overtime. The sheriff has made a decision that puts all of our lives at risk with about a two-week warning to, we, the people. The sheriff made a decision that does not support a concern for our safety. It shows a poor valuation of the people of the Indian Wells Valley.

First, let’s handle the spin points the sheriff will use to support this decision. He will point out that every area of the county needs to share in the hard times. Conceptually, I agree. However, only one of the other proposed cuts will immediately affect the safety of the people they are supposed to protect and serve.

The one 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 the safety of every person in the valley. 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 or Bakersfield 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 acceptable. It puts all of us at risk. Hey, our lives matter. Officers’ lives matter. We should not accept this life threatening decision.

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? Probably, but not a cut that affects our lives directly.

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 unfunding those positions? Truth be told, almost every cut the sheriff made resulted in moving deputies from one funded filled position to other unfilled funded positions, and deleting currently filled positions. Why not just decide to leave those unfilled funded positions, unfilled, and unfund them? That would generate the same cost savings and not make life threatening decisions. I fear this is pure politics. Is it just possible that the sheriff made this threat just so we would rebel against the supervisors hoping we would pressure the supervisors to increase the budget again? Sheriff, you have taken an oath to protect and serve the people of the whole county. This decision does not fulfill that oath. 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. Other options are available. To you viewers, don’t stand for this. Fight for our right of protection. Don’t sit by and let Sheriff Youngblood put our lives at risk. Let him know the decision is not acceptable. Time is critical. The sheriff has slated the jail to close next Saturday, February 20th.

In conclusion, come to city hall Wednesday evening at 5:30. Tell the sheriff: Our lives matter. Police lives matter. Step up and express some anger, and fight against this jail closure. It is possible to fight city hall, or in this case, the county sheriff.

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.