



Ready to Protect, Proud to Serve

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Editorial Board  
Arizona Daily Star  
4850 S Park Avenue  
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***Via: Electronic Mail***

Dear Editorial Board:

On August 7, your paper published an editorial piece entitled "***Adding cops fine, but please, no more confusion***". Within this editorial you proffer that I and other City leaders were misleading and dishonest in statements that without an increase in sales tax, city services, and particularly police services, would suffer dramatic setbacks. You give as proof quotations from different time periods and different situations that you try and present as conflicting. This is a prime example of not seeing the forest for the trees. So I would like to try and break down the different scenarios and clear up any confusion by looking at all the facts.

You start off the piece by stating you are glad we are hiring new officers via the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) and hope this will help restore "services that have been cut in these lean years." I am glad that you are pleased we are finally hiring again, and I am glad that you recognize that we have had to cut services in these past few years, even though the rest of your piece seems to infer that we have misled the public and have not hit a staffing crisis that would lead to a cut in service. That contradiction is confusing to me.

You claim whiplash because of my comment that the recent hiring of 35 officers is the first time that our staffing has gone up since I have been Chief. You support this by stating "It wasn't that long ago that Villaseñor and other city officials...warned residents that not passing a sales-tax increase would lead to massive cuts in our police and fire departments."

I hate to have to be the one to point out the obvious, but it needs to be acknowledged that prior to the economic crisis, and as recently as January 2009, the Tucson Police Department was authorized 1,113 commissioned officers and 404.5 civilian positions via the General Fund. As of July, 2011, we are now authorized 917 commissioned officers and 316.5 civilian positions via the General Fund. These are cuts of 197 officers and 88 civilians, which amounts to almost a 20% cut in police staffing since the economic crisis hit. Pretty massive cuts if you ask me.

Your next quote of me was that "Villaseñor told the Star's Jamar Younger that the Department would possibly have to lay off up to 170 officers if the sales tax did not pass. He described the federal grant funding for these officers as a way to soften the blow of those layoffs." You are right. I was wrong in the first part of that statement. We had to actually eliminate 197 officer positions as opposed to 170. Maybe what is causing the confusion is that we did this through holding vacancies and experiencing unexpected and rapid attrition, and not with layoffs. This is because officers and civilians in the agency began leaving for other jobs or other police departments due to the economic uncertainty of Tucson. As for the last part of the statement, I stand by the fact that the ARRA grant will help to soften the blow of the reduced staffing.

In that regard, it was only through the hard work of submitting a successful application that resulted in Tucson being awarded the second largest ARRA grant in the nation (which ironically was based in part on the articulated need and extensive staff reductions that we had already experienced) that allowed us to boost those numbers by over 50 grant funded positions. Even with that help, it will only bring us to an authorized staffing number of 973 officers, still 140 officers short of our previous authorized staffing of 1,113 officers. So where is the misleading information?

Additionally, when the City was considering the Core Tax proposal, a committee was formed which recommended to Council that different departments within the City experience different levels of cuts if the tax did not pass. This committee recommended that public safety only experience 10% cuts, even though both Police and Fire, along with every other department, submitted data detailing the effects of 15% reductions. Mayor and Council chose to go against this recommendation and put greater emphasis on public safety by limiting cuts to Fire at 6.7% and Police at 7.5%. These lower figures were arrived at after consultation with each department to determine the greatest cut that each department could endure via retirement and attrition, and without having to layoff personnel. As stated in your editorial, this decision was made in December 2010. The comments you are criticizing were made in October and November when all departments, including Police and Fire, were told to prepare for 15% cuts and then 10% cuts. I believe this is an unfair comparison and actually misleading on your part.

So, let's review. In October 2010, the Department was authorized 1,113 officers, but because of positions held vacant there were only 976 officers at that snapshot in time. That was 137 officers below our authorized strength. So we were already well into our downward slide of personnel. In November 2010, the voters defeated the Core Tax initiative, so it was clear that we were going to have to reduce our staffing even further. In anticipation of that, there were some personnel reassigned back to patrol and some revisions in our call response strategies in order to bolster our response capabilities, which were already suffering. In December 2010, Mayor and Council put a floor on our proposed losses, based upon what we could achieve without layoffs. Even with that floor, however, we were still required to absorb the loss of 59 more actual officers by July 2011 in order to reach our new maximum general fund staffing number of 917 officers in FY 2012. This was done through retirements and expected attrition. When we hired our first class in over two years on July 4, 2011, our staffing had actually dropped to 904 officers because of the unexpected attrition of an additional 13 officers. That is 209 officers below our peak

staffing, which is why I am so confused that the Star thinks we were misleading citizens about the losses in staffing that the Police Department was going to experience.

In closing, I too am glad about these new hires, and I hope they are the first step back on the long road to recovery. However, with the dismal economic news of the past week, I am concerned that we may be on the brink of further financial problems that could affect that recovery. But because of the extraordinary efforts of the men and women of the Tucson Police Department, I still feel that Tucson is a safe city. However, we cannot continue to overload the officers that we have and expect them to go on at this pace forever. With that in mind I will continue to be as transparent as I can with the staffing issues facing the Department, and the effect that they have on the level of service that we provide. I can only hope that the Star Editorial Board will do a better job in gathering the facts and presenting them in a fair, honest and comprehensive manner. You need to present all aspects of the issue and not piece together different quotes from different time periods and different scenarios in order to try and manufacture a conspiracy where none exists. The public deserves more from you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Roberto A. Villaseñor". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "R" and "V".

Roberto A. Villaseñor  
Chief of Police