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Fire union mailer attacks Cox

Shea Johnson, Daily Press

Posted: May 13, 2018, 5:31 p.m.



[James Quigg, Daily Press]

VICTORVILLE — As city officials report new optimism over the pace of the transition to a self-served department, the **County Fire** union has appeared to ratchet up tensions between the two entities with a mailer attacking Mayor Pro Tem Jim Cox.

Delivered to residents about two weeks ago, the so-called “Victorville Taxpayer REPORT” castigates Cox for purportedly putting taxpayers at risk through a series of fiascos, schemes and mismanagement over the past decade.

The mailer uses a combination of newspaper clippings and bullet points to paint a picture of Cox’s supposed financial tribulations: Grand Jury investigations, failed power plants and a pending SEC trial, to name a few. One page, “Jim Cox’s Latest Financial Scam,” is dedicated specifically to the transition from County Fire.

The problem, Cox contested, is that he was either not involved in described issues or they were distorted by the union.

“Even when they had a sliver of fact that had some truth to it,” Councilman Jim Kennedy said in a forceful defense of his peer during a recent Council meeting, “they twisted it so badly, that what was left when they were done wasn’t even close to the truth.”

Cox said he has hired and conferred with an attorney who is reviewing whether the union can be held legally liable.

But Jim Grigoli, president of Local 935, said they stood by the mailer.

“We have some pretty huge differences of opinion with Mr. Cox,” Grigoli said, “and his actions and his past history pretty much sets up for everything he gets and he deserves.”

The mailer, which would be considered a campaign attack ad if Cox were up for re-election in November (his current term expires in 2020), comes against the backdrop of a corrosive relationship between the city and union that seemed to begin eight months ago.

It was around September when the union put money behind the opposition effort to the city’s Measure K public safety tax, worried about how proposed revenues would be spent even if legally required to be earmarked for certain services.

Also, the city — in a financial pinch — had already declared it was reviewing other fire service options. Whereas Cox said Friday he believed if the tax had passed — it didn't — the city would have re-upped with County Fire for 10 more years, the union has questioned why city officials were non-committal to start, particularly because they have lauded the fire service.

The city has since made a series of moves toward re-launching the Victorville Fire Department that disbanded in 2008.

The transition hasn't been smooth. City officials reported being rebuffed during contract extension negotiations with County Fire to cover a gap period for services, and County Fire has noted difficulties in reaching essential city executives to move the process ahead.

More recently, the transition has seemed to have faced fewer roadblocks even as the two sides will never agree on the underlying fundamentals: That the city can obtain equivalent levels of service for less costs while adding 60-plus new public employees to its roster amid a volatile state retirement system.

Grigoli declined to address whether the mailer was meant to shake the electorate's confidence in the transition, saying he believed the mailer was "pretty self explanatory."

But it has deeply upset both Kennedy and Cox, with the former comparing the lack of a sender name on the literature as tantamount to "cockroaches" who would seem to lack conviction in the contents of the "vicious attack."

On Friday, Cox said it "still strikes me as odd that someone can tell a bold-faced lie and smile about it," while repeating a sentiment from an earlier Council meeting.

"Would you trust your health, safety, welfare of your children, your parents, your spouse to someone who would do such a thing?" he rhetorically asked. "I don't think so."

Kennedy also raised questions over whether the mailer, which only included a P.O. Box address and no committee ID, might have violated campaign finance laws.

Yet it wouldn't appear so.

It would be deemed an independent expenditure only if it expressly advocated for the defeat of a candidate and was sent within 60 days of the election, according to Jay Wierenga, spokesman for the Fair Political Practices Commission.

Even if it were considered political advertising, the committee ID number wouldn't be required, although other disclaimers would be, Wierenga said.

It wasn't immediately clear whether the city maintained any local rules on lobbying, which the mailer could be considered if it were trying to sway the outcome of some decision.

<http://www.vvdailynews.com/news/20180513/fire-union-mailer-attacks-cox>

Lytle Creek may finally get broadband Internet service

Staff Writer, Fontana Herald News

Posted: May 11, 2018

The San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors on May 1 unanimously adopted a resolution supporting Frontier Communications' request for state funding to install fiber-optic broadband infrastructure in the unincorporated canyon community of Lytle Creek, an area currently unserved by broadband Internet service.

“Broadband Internet is as commonly available as electricity and water service in most urban and suburban communities, but because of Lytle Creek’s remote location, residents have no access to reliable and affordable high-speed Internet,” said Supervisor Janice Rutherford, whose district includes Lytle Creek. “With no federal broadband funds available and no other service provider willing to come to the table, Frontier Communications has launched an ambitious campaign to secure the funds needed to provide the community with broadband. I am pleased the Board of Supervisors joined Lytle Creek residents in urging the California Public Utilities Commission to approve this vital project.”

Frontier has applied for for a \$1.8 million grant to serve Lytle Creek from the California Advanced Services Fund (CASF) program administered by the Public Utilities Commission. Last year, the Legislature authorized an additional \$330 million to the CASF program to fund broadband projects in remote, rural, high-cost communities like Lytle Creek that still lack Internet access.

If Frontier’s application and request for full funding is approved, the project would enable broadband service of up to 1 Gigabit to 339 households, plus businesses, public agencies, and anchor institutions. It also would enable high-speed Internet service to **San Bernardino County Fire** and U.S. Forest Service stations in Lytle Creek, enhancing public safety in an area designated by Cal-Fire, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, as a “community at risk” due to high fire danger.

https://www.fontanaheraldnews.com/business/lytle-creek-may-finally-get-broadband-internet-service/article_ba4db48e-555c-11e8-aae9-c30c05df3eb0.html

Students imagine their own deaths in drunk-driving scenario

Jene Estrada, Stacy Moore, Hi-Desert Star

Posted: May 11, 2018, 4:36 p.m.



Jene Estrada, Hi-Desert Star

YUCCA VALLEY — Juniors and seniors watched their classmates lying in the wreckage of a staged car crash, getting arrested and being rushed to the hospital on the Yucca Valley High School football field Thursday morning.

While the scene was merely a depiction of what could happen, real first-responders participated in the mock critical incident, including members of the California Highway Patrol, **San Bernardino County Fire** Department, Sheriff's Department and coroner, Morongo Basin Ambulance and Wiefels & Son Mortuary.

CHP Officer Jason Kobaly narrated the scene, in which eight students driving home from an after-prom party got into a head-on collision. Two, Briana Archer and Lucas Lopez, were dead on the scene and one, Faith Palmer, had to be helicoptered to an intensive care unit.

The "Every Fifteen Minutes" assembly has been presented since the mid 1990s, switching off every year between Yucca Valley and Twentynine Palms high schools. Sponsored by the state and CHP, the event is completely student run and student organized, in this case by the YVHS Associated Student Body and the junior class.

It is named for the premise that one person dies every 15 minutes in an alcohol related crash; according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, one person died in an alcohol-related crash every 50 minutes in the United States in 2016, the most recent year for which data is available.

"Every 15 Minutes" is a two-day program held the week before prom. Throughout the first day, about 33 students metaphorically died every 15 minutes and were removed from class while their obituaries were read. The students who died wore white masks and were encouraged to not speak to other students for the rest of the day.

They went on a retreat in Palm Desert Thursday night to write letters to their loved ones as though they had died, and to mimic their absence to their friends and family members.

Their parents held a vigil and workshop in the school library to write letters to their dead children.

On Friday, juniors and seniors filed into the gym for a mock funeral and the sentencing of their classmate accused of causing the accident staged on the football field, Dorian Padilla.

Padilla, dressed in orange prison scrubs and wearing handcuffs and chains, was led in by a CHP officer and sat front and center in front of his peers. Next to him were an urn and a casket, representing the remains of Lopez and Archer.

The assembly watched a movie made by classmates Angelina Quirante, Josiah Gouker and Sanwal Dilshad, showing the students from the crash as they arrived at school, talked to their friends about prom and ate dinner with their families. Joe Jennings staged a promposal for Archer, she said “yes,” and the two went out on a date. Padilla, Palmer, Lopez, Jacqueline Bolha and Andrew Gamboa went to the dance and then had a party in the desert, snapping photos and drinking before getting into a car and driving into Jennings’ truck.

The film showed the teenagers stumbling out of the cars and finding their friends’ bodies. Palmer, a track star, was flown to the hospital, went through a CAT scan and told she would never walk again. Padilla was taken to the Joshua Tree jailhouse, where the film showed the bars slamming shut on his cell.

After the film, three of the students declared dead the day before read letters to their families.

One of them, Hector Mojica, described dying when he was hit by a drunk driver on the way to pick up his prom date.

“I will regret not saying I love you every time you said it to me on the phone,” he told his mom. “It hurts to know you won’t see your little boy graduate from high school.”

Mojica read messages to his friends, too, some of whom he’s known since elementary school. “I cherish all the times we had,” he said.

“My last day on earth was prom night,” Demarriyaa Goodson said in a letter to her parents.

“I never got to thank you for adopting me and my brothers and giving us a second chance.”

She promised to watch over her brothers even after death. “One day I hope I get to see you again.”

Auggie Williams told his mom he had been worrying about leaving her alone to go to college. “I never thought I’d be leaving forever.”

He had imagined a lifetime of coaching sports, maybe starting a jazz band to keep playing the music his grandfather taught him to love, and marrying his girlfriend. “I imagined having you by my side through every chapter of our lives,” he told her in his letter.

“It absolutely destroys me that I had to leave you like this.”

At the conclusion of the assembly, Padilla was “sentenced” to prison and led away in handcuffs. Activities Director Matt Rauch believes in the power of the program.

“We’ve seen a decline in drunk driving accidents in recent years and I think part of it has to do with outreach events like this,” Rauch said. “What we really want students to take away from this is to just be aware of your actions and understand the effect they can have on an entire community.”