

Cut all librarians before any cop?

11 comments by **E. J. Montini** - Feb. 2, 2010 12:00 AM
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If these were better days and we were better people, the murder of a in Gilbert wouldn't have anything to do with the job status of librarians in Phoenix.

But times are tough. And we are who we are.

To deal with a \$242 million budget deficit, Phoenix is planning a series of cuts to all types of . Transportation. Senior centers. Libraries. As well as police and firefighters.

Already the police are fighting back. The Phoenix Law Enforcement Association has sponsored a television spot showing a frightened woman in a darkened house calling 911.

"We'll get out there eventually," the dispatcher tells her. Adding, "We're already down 450 officers, and the city wants to lay off more."

A narrator then urges viewers to call city officials and tell them not to reduce public-safety jobs.

"The bottom line is . . . I love the librarian, but I need the police officer," said PLEA President Mark Spencer. "That's why I'm dialing 911. That ad clearly communicates our issues, and that's why we put that on. That's what it is going to come down to."

The same argument came up last week after Gilbert police Lt. Eric Shuhandler was murdered during a traffic stop.

Spencer and others said that the work of police officers is too important and too potentially dangerous for a force to be reduced.

Phoenix bureaucrats and politicians get the point. They already have made cuts to other departments. And more will continue. Under the latest proposal, six library branches, five senior centers and a number of and community centers would close. There also would be funding cuts for arts and after-school programs. And bus routes and light-rail hours would be reduced.

But there is also the possibility of cutting 353 sworn positions in the and 144 from the Fire Department.

It has to do with balancing safety and other services. With developing ways to do more with less, as has happened with businesses,

cities and states all over the country.

If these were better days and we were better people, scare tactics would not enter into that discussion.

But times are tough. And we are who we are.

As someone who's lived in Phoenix for 30 years, I asked Spencer, "Should EVERY librarian be cut before ANY police officer?"

"It might come down to that," he said. "I think we are at a point now where we are in economic triage. It's like a soldier getting wounded on a battlefield. You bring him into the MASH tent, and that is not the time for a tummy tuck or Botox. Keep his core essentials functioning so that he can live. That's true of the city. The city is in economic triage and even though it might cost a limb, which is a dear cost, the issue is life and to keep the city alive we need water for drinking and sewage, we need our trash picked up, we need our fires put out and we need our bad guys in jail. Those are the core essentials."

This isn't simply a cop speaking. It's a union president. And it isn't just about public safety. It's about jobs. Spencer is doing what every good union president should do.

He's sticking up for his members. But there are lots of creative ways to keep to a minimum. Furloughs. Pay cuts. Other towns have done it.

Besides, if Phoenix wants to climb out of an economic abyss by attracting tourists and new businesses, it's not going to do so by losing all of the amenities that make it such a great place to live and work and visit.

If these were better days and we were better people, we'd know that. But . . .

Reach Montini at 602-444-8978 or ed.montini@arizonarepublic.com.

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