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COUNTY OF RIVERSIDE

**Core Functions – Opinion Editorial**  
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For the first time in our county's modern history we are the third safest mid to large county in California. Our violent crime rate has never been so low, according to recent Attorney General statistics. The current economic crisis unfortunately threatens that safety.

Since I took office in January 2007, we have cut costs and reorganized our taxpayer-provided resources. In times like these every dollar counts. One example is my rejection of \$13 million in new furniture for our Riverside office which County officials had proposed. Substantial savings also came from designing in-house training programs that are as good, if not better than costly outside training. We are fortunate to rely on the best prosecutorial personnel in the state to train.

These measures, and close to fifty more, have enabled us to save taxpayers millions of dollars.

Unfortunately, next fiscal year is problematic. The County Executive Officer (CEO) has asked for another 10% cut. Such action would be cutting into the "muscle and bone" of our prosecutorial agency for several reasons.

In our budget for next year we have not asked for one additional person or for funds to create new programs. In fact we have cut our supplies and services budget by \$6.2 million. We have merely asked the county to cover the dramatically increased costs the county has imposed.

Our office is mandated to pay for services provided by other county departments. Dramatic increases have in essence amounted to budget cuts. Though there has been no change in service and no new buildings to clean, the janitorial fees the county charges our department has increased **222%** over the past four years. Building maintenance fees have been even higher – **412%**.

Next year's janitorial, maintenance and a few other fees will cost an extra \$815,373. Total payments to other county departments are nearly \$8.6 million. Unfortunately, this is money that will not be spent arresting and prosecuting criminals.

But this hasn't been our only cost increase. County negotiated contracts with the several unions that represent our employees contain provisions that will increase salaries and benefits. The extra cost for next year alone is \$5.4 million. We need only look to our past to see the cause.

As the fastest growing county in the state over the past 15 years our population has exploded. In the next decade one million more people are expected to arrive. In the decades to follow our population is expected to double. Imagine having twice as many predators roaming our streets.

This population tidal wave has predictably swamped our staff. In 1987 our office handled over 10,000 misdemeanors and felonies a year. By 2007 that number had grown to over 60,000. Gang members, sex predators and lesser criminals don't recognize budget downturns. In fact, crime goes up when times are bad. Recently, our Sheriff reported a spike in crime.

Past economic crises brought freezes, and other devices that stopped growth in public safety departments, while population and crime increased. When times were better our department tried to catch up, but we couldn't make up all the lost ground.

Historically all county departments have grown to meet the crush of more population and public needs. Some have grown much faster than others, such as the Code Enforcement Department which grew an astounding 297% in county costs in the past four years, second only to Animal Control (330%).

In the past year hiring freezes, “golden handshakes,” and other measures have greatly reduced our staff and stopped us from filling approved positions needed to fight rising crime. The current reduction amounts to 145 lost staff already. We have also intentionally not filled 18 managerial positions to save money and prevent increases in workloads.

To all of these losses the CEO has proposed laying off another 110 District Attorney employees, which would increase lost staff to 275. Wisely, three Supervisors have resisted the wholesale dismantling of probably the finest and most effective prosecutorial agency in the state. Unfortunately, the CEO’s proposal didn’t stop there.

He also proposed laying off 89 more employees in the County Fire agency and astonishingly proposed 588 more layoffs for the Sheriff’s Department and closing an entire jail. Just for these three departments the CEO has proposed a total of 787 layoffs. The grand total for the whole county is 973. Therefore 80% of his proposed layoffs are from public safety agencies alone.

Under the CEO’s proposal, public safety departments would be hit most severely. With large losses of more prosecutors, investigators, deputies, and firefighters there would be less protection for our community at a time of great need.

While we have a duty to solve this current financial predicament, we also have a duty to the future. What harm will we do, what will we destroy that can’t be rebuilt, and whose lives will be affected tomorrow by the decisions made today?

Today our office continues to have one of the highest conviction rates in the state. Over the last decade, because of the efforts and sacrifices of the men and women of our office and other public safety agencies, we have become one of the safest counties in California. What has been built over decades should not now be torn down in haste.