

Consolidation Distortion – “Health and Safety Issues”

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As I continue my review of the public materials presented by the consolidation proponents, I have come across another serious misrepresentation of facts.

Although Sun Valley City Councilman Dave Chase has full access to the facts, he has apparently decided to disregard them. Instead, through what you can see below, he is propagating the fabrications of the long-time proponents of consolidation.

This case of distortion regarding the Sun Valley Fire Department is taken directly from the Chase and Conn blog site. These are their words (with emphasis added):

Health and Safety Issues

February 22, 2009 by One Community, One Town

When many citizens count on their local government, they are primarily thinking of one main area – health & safety. With low crime and an older population in Sun Valley, health & safety is ensured by their fire department. In general, there should only be a positive change to current services levels.

The most likely change to service levels for fire safety would be an improved response time for fire department personnel. Why? As it is, for many incidents (heart attacks, etc.) in Sun Valley, Ketchum fire fighters are first on the scene as they have full-time personnel around the clock. Further, the Ketchum Fire Department has Paramedic-level personnel who are able to provide a significantly higher level of medical care that is vital in the minutes after a medical incident occurs. If the fire station in Elkhorn was staffed like the Ketchum fire station (i.e., 24 hours), it is likely that response times would be reduced (i.e., improved) in Sun Valley and a more qualified Paramedic first-responder would arrive on the scene. With the aging population in our valley, this is more critical every year.

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The truth is the Sun Valley Police and Fire Departments are the first on the scene for all incidents in the City of Sun Valley. A large number of our firefighters live in the City of Sun Valley and respond immediately to calls, arriving at incidents

within minutes. Ketchum firefighters are only called out to City of Sun Valley incidents if there is a reason for which they are needed (i.e. mutual aid, auto aid, or if an ambulance with a paramedic is needed).

For the relatively small number of medical related incidents in Sun Valley which require an ambulance, our emergency personnel, who are also highly trained first responders and EMTs, are first on the scene with automatic defibrillators and advanced equipment. They size up the situation, report the information to the incoming ambulance, stabilize the injured and prepare the patient for the eventual arrival of the ambulance. Many lives have been saved by this response tactic, which is also used by Ketchum.

It is very important to understand that the ambulance service the City of Ketchum provides to Sun Valley is done pursuant to a contract for service with Blaine County. The taxpayers of Sun Valley pay for that ambulance service directly through a special tax assessment to Blaine County amounting to roughly \$340,000 per year. The fact that a Ketchum firefighter shows up on that ambulance has nothing to do with providing better service to Sun Valley under city consolidation. That is a contractual relationship we are already paying for through the County. Please do not let the consolidation proponents fool you into thinking you are going to get a new benefit for which we are already paying.

One of the main reasons the City of Sun Valley did not proceed with the consolidation of its fire department with Ketchum's last year was because Ketchum and ex-Mayor Thorson used that same argument regarding the ambulance service. The original fire consolidation study also contained inaccurate information which we pointed out. We also showed with factual information, based on sound financial data, that it would have been financially disadvantageous to the taxpayers of Sun Valley and would not have improved the level of service. We found that our experience of using paid on-call firefighters is a far more cost efficient model for smaller towns like ours, than Ketchum's use of full-time employees. Former Mayor Thorson challenged my data, but when I asked him three times to show where I might have been incorrect, he refused to answer.

One last point: the number of ambulance calls to the Elkhorn area of Sun Valley is minimal and would not justify the expense of staffing full-time paramedic first-responders and an ambulance in Elkhorn. That would be irresponsible management and a significant additional expense to the taxpayers.

I appreciate your continued feedback. Your ideas and suggestions have been excellent. Great thanks.

Nils