

Mayor's remarks are 'shameful'

By Mohave County Manager Ron Walker

Bullhead City Mayor Jack Hakim is once again lecturing Mohave County on how to spend, or over-spend, tax dollars. Apparently he believes all taxpayers, whether they are in Dolan Springs, Topock or elsewhere, should subsidize his city's expenses as well as fully fund social programs that cost Bullhead City absolutely nothing.

With continued attacks on those of us who have worked hard to balance our budgets and continue mandated services during this lousy economy, Hakim has used his soapbox to make comments regarding Mohave County's budget realities – a subject about which he has no clue. He continued to offer his expertise free of charge, and worth every penny, at the Tri-City Council meeting in Lake Havasu City Wednesday.

As for the Tri-City Council, I believe that gathering is ideal for city elected officials to gather and compare notes about situations they have in common to, perhaps, learn better ways from each other to solve their internal city problems. Unfortunately, from its inception, this group has too often chosen to lecture other governing agencies.

Hakim and other members of the Tri-City Council seem to think they should not have to pay their fair share for putting their prisoners in the County Jail. During Wednesday's meeting, Lake Havasu City Attorney Paul Lenkowsky ridiculously misrepresented the truth in a statement paraphrased by reporter Neil Young in the *Mohave Valley Daily News*. According to the *News*, "...the cities are paying all the costs of housing prisoners, while residents who live in unincorporated areas of the county are

paying nothing, Lenkowsky said." What a load of baloney!

The breakdown of jail costs for Fiscal Year 2009-10 estimated a total expense of \$9,978,552. Bullhead City's share was \$332,412, which is 3.3 percent of that total. Lake Havasu City's costs were \$260,337 at 2.6 percent and Kingman's costs were \$192,280 at 1.9 percent of the total. \$9,193,552 came out of Mohave County's General Fund. Does that look like county taxpayers are "paying nothing"?

Although jail costs are not a tax, but are a fee for service, Hakim has pontificated that the depreciation costs are double taxation. Is it double taxation that more than \$2,415,000 in sales tax was paid through the construction of the County Jail with Kingman receiving \$615,000? Kingman also received another \$850,000 in permit and development fees. Under Hakim's definition of double taxation, I assume he will not charge sales taxes and permitting fees to the county for the new library expansion project in Bullhead City.

Cities only pay for the services provided to accommodate prisoners from their municipal courts. So, they have full control of who they put in jail. Some crimes require the accused to go to jail – domestic violence for example. Other low-level misdemeanors do not require jail time. Instead of complaining about the costs of putting city accused in jail, they should manage their own courts to ensure only those who really need to be in jail are sent there. Better city management can reduce their portion of jail costs.

As to Hakim's comments regarding Mohave County Senior Services free meals programs, he needs to put his money where his mouth is.

This year, Mohave County will sponsor congregate and Meals on Wheels for all senior centers to the tune of \$421,000, \$250,000 of which comes from our General Fund. The federal grant, roughly \$396,000, requires a 10 percent match of around \$39,000. Our General Fund puts in more than six times that amount. No other county grant-funded program requires or receives as high a matching fund. Yes, in prior years, we put in 12 times the mandated match for the seniors, but, whether Hakim knows it or not, we are in an economic downturn and our revenues have been cut. Therefore, our expenses must be cut.

The key is that Meals on Wheels will not be cut. Our fiscally conservative supervisors have made sure that those people who financially qualify, those who are truly in need, will be served.

But, congregate meals do not require a financial qualification. Our centers are not allowed to charge for congregate meals, but they do ask for a donation of \$3 each. Unfortunately, the average donation for all senior center congregate meals is \$1.74. They obviously aren't valued very highly.

Although Hakim called Mohave County's trim of senior funding for Bullhead City (\$70,000) "shameful," he is apparently afraid "the burden may fall" on the cities, "with their budgets already stretched to the max," according to the *Daily News* article. Does he think he has the only public budget stretched to the max? Were the Bullhead City Council's decisions to lay off employees and order furlough days "shameful," or just necessary budgetary actions to continue mandated services?

Mohave County has balanced its budget every year for many years, but it has not come without additional sacrifices from all county departments and elected officials. We have downsized our active workforce by more than 14 percent leading to 107 less General Fund positions to carry out mandated services. The development of the Deputy County Manager System alone eliminated seven positions and saved the county \$560,000 per year. Total property tax revenues of \$27,422,000 were received for last year. The criminal justice system alone costs Mohave County \$58, 696,000. That's 78 percent of the General Fund Budget.

Our budget is also stretched to the max by mandated services for prisoners, looming health care increases and other possible thefts of county funds by the state Legislature. If things get worse, we may have to close satellite offices in cities other than the County Seat. I think Mohave County has done a very good job in continuing Meals on Wheels and other necessary and mandated services. And although carping from people who want the county property taxpayers to subsidize their personal bills is getting quite common, one doesn't expect it from a mayor.

When Hakim said, "We owe our seniors a lot more than this," he should have been a little more specific. Since the cities are worried the "burden may fall on them, with their budgets already stretched to the max," I would guess one needs to determine what the definition of "We" is. With the county spending \$421,000 on senior meal programs for city and county residents (with only one senior center outside city limits) the only "We" paying the bill right now is county government.

Bullhead City has contributed exactly \$0 for these senior meal programs this year. If anyone should be ashamed, it should be you, Mr. Mayor.