

## Support from out of the (boys in) blue for Arpaio

On Monday, Sheriff Joe Arpaio got some support from out of the blue.

From a couple of boys in blue, to be exact, when two Phoenix police officers, one in the Maryvale precinct and one who works downtown, called to tell me that Arpaio had done local police – and us – a big favor.

Or as one of Phoenix officers put it, “The fact is, since our department has allowed officers to partner with ICE (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement) our jobs have gotten easier. The streets are a little safer. And we (the officers) are a little safer. And honestly, Arpaio’s policy is what helped us to get our new policy.”

This is NOT what the critics of Arpaio want to hear. I know. I’m one of them. But among all of the people who are involved with illegal immigration, none deserve of our attention more than the officers who patrol the streets.

However, since neither of these officers felt comfortable speaking on the record, I contacted Mark Spencer, president of the Phoenix Law Enforcement Association, and asked him if other union members are saying the same thing.

“Yes,” he said. “I think that the current policy, which allows our guys to communicate with ICE based on reasonable suspicion, has been very helpful. Just as I think that the pro-active immigration legislation coming out of the state legislature has been helpful.”

Spencer also believes that Arpaio has been the target of unfair criticism. He points out that it was public pressure generated by Arpaio’s aggressive approach to immigration enforcement that led to changes in Phoenix’s policy. And Spencer believes that was a good thing.

“We had the president of the border patrol union in here recently,” he told me. “He reported to us that apprehensions at the border have gone down 24 percent. Well, we look at that here and we see a correlation. (Mayor) Phil Gordon just said at the State of the City address -- and he’s correct -- that violent crimes in the city of Phoenix have gone down 24 percent. Stolen vehicles in the city of Phoenix have gone down 27 percent. So, we see that as a real common sense connection.”

On Monday, Mayor Gordon, a long-time critic of Arpaio, said that because of impending Civil Rights investigations into the sheriff, as well as Congressional hearings, he will stop speaking publicly about Arpaio.

For his part, Spencer believes that the sheriff is being targeted over politics, not police work.

He also believes that the revised immigration enforcement policy in Phoenix (which Gordon supported) has decreased crime.

“I think the new policy cultivates an atmosphere of deterrence,” Spencer said. “If during a contact we believe a person is in the country illegally and that person is in some way connected to criminal activity we are authorized to make a phone call to ICE with a supervisor’s permission. The key in that policy is the connection to criminal activity. I think that is a very reasonable starting point.”

How is he so certain of this?

Last week, Spencer attended the sentencing hearing for Jose Abel Cabrera-Somosa.

During a routine traffic stop in October of 2007, Cabrera-Somosa shot Phoenix Officer Bret Glidewell in the chest. The officer was saved by a bulletproof vest and later identified Cabrera-Somosa, an undocumented immigrant from El Salvador, as the shooter.

"Somosa claimed in court that he had been in the country six years and had been stopped by the police four times," Spencer said. "Well, a more pro-active policy would have relieved our officer of that life threatening situation and it would have relieved this guy of having to spend the next 34 years in prison."

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