

Maricopa County Sheriff's Office

Joe Arpaio, Sheriff



Date: August 18, 2009

PETTY POLITICS TRUMPS PUBLIC SAFETY AS COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS REFUSES TO PUT NEW INMATE TRANSPORT BUS INTO SERVICE

NEW BUS GROUNDED AS SHERIFF'S OFFICE STRUGGLES WITH BROKEN DOWN SCHOOL BUSES AS TRANSPORT VEHICLES

(Phoenix, AZ) Maricopa County Sheriff Joe Arpaio said today that County Manager David Smith and his bosses, the Maricopa County Board of Supervisors, are behaving badly by refusing to license and insure the new inmate transport bus. Sheriff Arpaio says playing politics in this way jeopardizes public safety.

The bus, considered by the prison industry as the most efficient inmate transport vehicle on the market today, was delivered to the Sheriff's Office on May 8, 2009 and ready for immediate use. But county officials refuse to license the bus and provide the insurance for it, effectively grounding the vehicle indefinitely. Apparently angered by the fact that the Sheriff purchased this bus without the express permission of the board, the Supervisors have retaliated by repeatedly taking the issue off the agenda, refusing to approve the addition of the new bus to the Sheriff's fleet.

"This bus was purchased with money from the Jail Enhancement Fund (JEF), not from the county budget," Arpaio says. "As Sheriff, I have sole discretion on how this particular fund is used. We determined this vehicle was critical to enhance our jail operations. It's time the board and its county manager, David Smith, put public safety above their own political agendas and egos and stop interfering with my mandated duties."

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News Release

JEF monies come from fines imposed by the courts against those who break the law.

The MCI manufactured bus is a specially designed prison transport vehicle used by jails and prisons throughout the country. It is safer, more dependable and generally deemed as the best value for the money by industry experts.

The five buses now in use by the Sheriff's Office are manufactured by Bluebird, which makes buses for school districts to transport children. Those buses are designed to be used for short periods of time, short distances and are traveling roadways only part of any given year.

Prison transport buses, conversely, must be capable of operating 18 hours a day, 365 days of the year and log tens of thousands of miles each year, something the Bluebird school buses cannot do.

Arpaio says the Bluebird buses are so inefficient for his Office's purposes that they have been in the shop 55% of the time and have cost taxpayers \$230,000 in the last three years for repairs alone.

"Would a commuter be willing to hang onto a car that was in the shop six months of every year," Arpaio says. "A person with some business smarts certainly wouldn't."

Arpaio says the board's refusal to put this bus into service negatively impacts the ability of the Sheriff's office to meet court, medical and inter-facility transfers of inmates in a timely way.

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