

February 4, 2010

An Open Letter to the Idaho State Legislators:

The Kootenai County Task Force on Human Relations writes to you today about a matter of grave concern. As you are well aware, our esteemed State of Idaho is recognized throughout our nation as the "Gem State". We are celebrated for our outdoor-oriented community, our abundant natural resources and our commitment to the public safety of our citizens that ensures our quality of life. Recently, it has come to light that these fundamentals we hold dear in our state are threatened by lawlessness due to the unresponsive and uncooperative actions of the Benewah County Sheriff's Department with regard to crimes committed on The Coeur d'Alene Tribe's reservation.

The Coeur d'Alene Tribe is proposing the "State and Indian Tribal Cooperative Law Enforcement Act" that enables all tribal police officers the authority to arrest, or cite non-tribal members violating state law on reservations. Violators would be sent to state court. This legislation is necessary to ensure the safety of the citizens living both on and off of the Reservation in Benewah County.

The Benewah County Sheriff's Department under the direction of Sheriff Bob Kirts has steadfastly refused to initiate a cross-deputization agreement with the Coeur d'Alene Tribal Police. The Benewah County Sheriff's Department has also failed to respond in a timely manner or at all, for calls for assistance from the Tribal Police. Neighboring Kootenai County under the leadership of Sheriff Rocky Watson has had a long-standing agreement of cross-deputization with tribal police as well as other surrounding agencies. This agreement has worked remarkably well to protect citizens from criminal activity. The failure of Sheriff Kirts to work with the Tribal Police has left citizens in bedlam. Perpetrators have been set free that have committed serious criminal offenses against citizens living in Benewah County. The Tribal Police have documented cases of domestic violence, driving under the influence incidents, criminal assaults, and other criminal offenses that have occurred with no arrests or prosecution.

Imagine a city where child molesters and rapists can now roam free and continue to violate their victims with no repercussions. Gangs will spring forth, drug dealers will continue undeterred, and citizens will continue to fall victim to felony crimes. The Kootenai County Task Force on Human Relations is deeply concerned about this issue. We urge you, our protectors and leaders, to enact this legislation that will ensure the citizens of Benewah County and the residents of the Reservation the security, and quality of life they deserve as Idahoans.

Sincerely,

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The Kootenai County Task Force on Human Relations  
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