

## Kendramama: Disgusted that public isn't doing something about county jail

I myself am thoroughly disgusted by the blind eye Kootenai County voters seem to be turning toward this issue.

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Having been a resident of said jail way back when- and yes, overcrowding was just as bad then as it is now- I can attest to just how necessary more space, more staff, and hopefully THIS time a higher quality of construction is. (Whoever did the last expansion did a shoddy job- there are cracks in the cement and plaster everywhere, crumbling walls and ceilings, and in one spot it was so bad the men and women's pods that abutted each other had a crack so large they were actually able to PASS NOTES through it! They called it the "fax machine", as I recall...)

I remember feeling as though I was in a powder keg, just waiting for the right spark to set it off... the women's side was SO overcrowded (so, exponentially, the men's had to be twice as bad) that every bunk was full, none of the "enemies" or known lesbians could be segregated due to the lack of space- nor the more dangerous offenders- so fights broke out constantly... because of the lack of bunks, there were what we called "boats" lined up in rows under the stairs (portable bed frames with the rubberized mats we slept on crammed inside them) and since this was out of view of the cameras and viewing glass of the central "pod gods", all sorts of hijinks went on under there... Most vividly, I recall a girl, couldn't have been more than 19 or 20, who was hemorrhaging from a miscarriage in progress. When several of us frantically tried to summon help, the guards were so overwhelmed with crises elsewhere it was a full 20 minutes before a harried male deputy arrived, totally clueless of the situation. He then requested one of the two nurses on duty in the jail to come check her out, but since it happened to be the time of day that THOSE poor ladies, also dangerously understaffed (about one per 175 inmates), were administering insulin to all the diabetics back in the medical area. So, almost an hour after the bleeding began, the girl was finally taken out of the pod by stretcher, and hopefully made it to the hospital before she'd passed from regular miscarriage into transfusion territory.

Those few examples I hope at least shed a little light on how badly overcrowding and understaffing can affect the entire balance- precarious to begin with- of an institution such as KCPSB- from a former inmate's perspective, anyhow. I shudder when I hear some of the stories from the men, who have it even worse than the women (adding mucho testosterone and subtracting some IQ points may have something to do with it! hee hee), and when I read the editorials written by jail deputies I really feel for those brave men and women who have to work in such an environment.

Why are people so determined to let a bad situation get worse? Just to save a half-cent sales tax on their purchases? I know the bottom line numbers sound huge, but when a federal judge mandates that we pay anyway (which in my opinion, is almost certain to happen) the end result'll be the same- or worse. And meanwhile, we apparently champion the idiocy of spending over 50 million to ship inmates elsewhere, not to mention all that extra work shuttling them back and forth for court appearances.

So yeah, I'm disappointed that the expansion didn't go through- and I just pray that no riots, needless deaths, or too many more deputies quitting in disgust happen before we finally open our eyes- or a judge forcibly does it for us.

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