

For Immediate Release

Joint Republican & Independence Challenge to City Council and Mayor to make a Real Commitment to Public Safety; Call for police hiring benchmarks

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While we pull together as a community in response to the bridge collapse, we must remain diligent in addressing the pressing public safety problems in the City of Minneapolis . Today, Mayor Rybak took that step and we want to challenge him and the City Council to make good on earlier promises to keep the city safe with the addition of 50 more police officers.

50 More Cops Now

We support the police federation in their campaign to bring more cops to Minneapolis . We believe that the mayor's first priority should be to keep the promise he made one year ago. The city's police department should be restored to 893 sworn officers, the number of officers that existed just four years ago, before the city's drastic cuts to police department staffing. Even though the mayor promised to restore the department to 893 officers, and the city council budgeted the funds to achieve that commitment, we now stand 50 officers short of the goal. By year end, with no plans to hire additional officers, the department is likely to be at least 65 officers short of the goal.

Making Tax Dollars Work for Citizens

Blaming cuts in local government aid (LGA) as the culprit for the police officer shortfall is misleading. While our parties may have disagreements regarding LGA, there is no doubt that Governor Ventura stood up for LGA in 2002 on the grounds of accountability. It is ironic that LGA is now being used for finger pointing and denying accountability. The mayor continues to refer to annual losses of \$30 million per year in state aid. The truth is that there was one cut in LGA aid (\$20 million cut to LGA in city's general fund) – that occurred in 2003 when the state budget faced a huge deficit. Although the city has not received as much LGA as it would have liked – or as much budgeted by the state at the high water mark of 2003 – there have been no LGA cuts since 2003.

The city's increase of the property tax levy by \$72 million in 2007 compared to 2002 more than makes up for any disappointment in LGA funds received.

Citizens Deserve Benchmarks

We call on the Mayor and City Council to immediately set in place benchmarks and publish a timeline for hiring new police officers . The Mayor and City Council should set a timetable to make good on their commitment to build the police department up to 893 sworn officers in 2007. We have had enough rhetoric about public safety being first priority. Enough words; the citizens of Minneapolis deserve definitive actions. This means 50 more cops by year end.

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