

NEWS > POLITICS

# Supervisor Tavaglione tells Sheriff Sniff to stop fighting Riverside County's cost-cutting efforts



File photo by Mark Dustin, Contributing Photographer  
Riverside County Sheriff Stan Sniff addresses the audience at a tribute to fallen officers in this December 2016 file photo. Sniff and Supervisor John Tavaglione had a tense exchange

during the county Board of Supervisors meeting Tuesday, July 25.

---

By **JEFF HORSEMAN** |



[jhorseman@scng.com](mailto:jhorseman@scng.com) | The Press-

Enterprise

PUBLISHED: July 26, 2017 at 3:54 pm | UPDATED: July 27, 2017 at 11:27 am

---

Riverside County Sheriff Stan Sniff is getting close to \$18 million in extra funding after warning that his department needed as much as \$50 million more to avoid deep cuts that could compromise public safety in unincorporated areas.

The money allocated by the county Board of Supervisors on Tuesday, July 25, came after a tense exchange between Sniff and Supervisor John Tavaglione, who accused Sniff of resisting an ongoing efficiency effort and publicly badmouthing supervisors.

At issue is how much Sniff's department is getting in the county's \$5.5 billion budget. Currently, county supervisors are struggling with how to put the county's finances on a sustainable path that doesn't draw down savings.

Revenues are growing, but still haven't matched what they were before the Great Recession of 2007-08. At the same time, the county faces with a mounting list of new, ongoing and inflexible expenses, from a lawsuit settlement requiring more spending on jail inmates' health care to the potential of having to pay tens of millions more for in-home care for indigent adults.

Spending on public safety consumes roughly three out of every four discretionary dollars. County officials have said that non-public safety departments have been cut to the bone, and more must be done to control public safety costs. To that end, supervisors hired consulting firm KPMG to make county government more efficient and data-driven.

Much of KPMG's work focuses on the Sheriff's Department, and the firm has said Sniff can save money by shifting deputies' schedules and using non-sworn personnel and a telephone system to handle minor, non-emergency calls. An experiment to test some of KPMG's ideas is underway at the sheriff's patrol station in Hemet. The Lake Elsinore station will soon be included.

As an elected official, Sniff can't be fired. While KPMG has praised the sheriff and his staff for their cooperation, Sniff has been skeptical about whether KPMG's efforts will yield substantial savings.

On Tuesday, KPMG reported that the Hemet station showed improved response times for high-priority calls, although there was a slight lag in the overall wait time for lower-level calls.

Sniff produced his own figures showing wait times for low-level calls – those make up the bulk of calls, he said – increasing from May to July. He also played a voicemail from an unidentified caller who complained about multiple robberies in his neighborhood in recent weeks and having to wait hours for a deputy to respond.

“It's a little bit early to pop out the Champagne corks” regarding KPMG's work, Sniff said.

**‘Don't ... snow me’**

Last month, Sniff told supervisors he bridged a \$40 million shortfall by not replacing hundreds of departed employees and taking deputy patrols in unincorporated communities down to bare-bones levels.

Unless he was given another \$50 million – or, at a minimum, \$25 million to \$30 million – beyond what the budget called for, Sniff warned he'd have to look at closing jails or patrol stations.

“The free-fall on full-time staffing has to stop on this,” he said Tuesday. “Because otherwise, once I hit bottom, I’m really stuck with some really difficult – along with you – very difficult forced choices.”



Riverside County Supervisor John Tavaglione.

Tavaglione took issue with Sniff’s assertion that only two deputies patrol hundreds of square miles at a time. He asked the sheriff how many sergeants and lieutenants were available and whether they respond to calls.

They do, Sniff said, but unlike rank-and-file deputies, they have supervisory duties.

“I know first-hand that city of Riverside sergeants are always responding to calls, because they’re short-staffed as well,” Tavaglione said. “So don’t try to snow me over because sergeants do respond to calls and they’re there to help the deputies. They’re not sitting on their butts.”

“Supervisor, nobody’s arguing that,” Sniff replied as he stood at the podium. “But the difference between 82 square miles ...”

“Don’t try to blow ... smoke up my colleagues and say we only have two deputies,” Tavaglione interjected.

“There *are* only two deputies,” Sniff said.

“The point I’m trying to make,” Tavaglione said later, “is that you have more than two deputies. And secondly, you came up here and you immediately, rather than saying ‘This (KPMG process) is a good process,’ you haven’t heard a damn thing we’ve been saying.”

“I think I’ve heard it quite well,” Sniff said.

“Let me finish, please,” the supervisor said. “You haven’t heard a darn thing about what we’ve been saying. You come up here and say, ‘Before we break out the Champagne bottle.’”

“That’s being defensive,” Tavaglione added. “What we’ve been saying is, we only have so much money in the pot.”

“We get that, supervisor,” Sniff said.

“I’m not sure you do, Stan,” Tavaglione said, adding he was the third and decisive vote in appointing Sniff to fill the vacant sheriff’s post in 2007.

“Supervisor, I appreciate that,” Sniff said. “That was 10 years ago. And I do appreciate that. But that doesn’t solve the here and now on managing the department or dealing with not enough resources.”

## **‘Stop fighting us’**

Tavaglione said Sniff should “stop fighting us.”

“Supervisor, who’s fighting you?” Sniff said. “I just listened to a lot of kudos come from KPMG about how well we’re working together.”

Later, Tavaglione told Sniff: “We work with your team here. Your team is doing good stuff ... But every time you get up here, I have to tell you I get very disappointed and so does (Supervisor Chuck Washington).

“He sits behind you at an event and hears you badmouth us,” Tavaglione said. “We get Facebook ... posts – what a bad job the Board of Supervisors (is doing). We don’t appreciate that. Because all we’ve been doing for the past 10 years is supporting you and your agency. And you know damn well that’s the truth.”

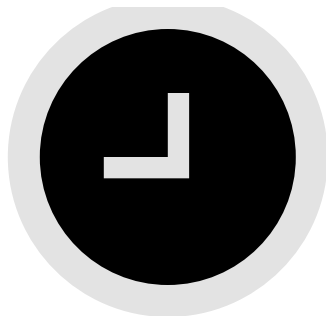
“Well, we’ve had a few reductions in the last couple years,” Sniff said. “The board has been very good to the Sheriff’s Department. There’s no question.”

Last month, the county executive office suggest giving Sniff another \$10 million. That was changed to give the sheriff \$17.9 million to reflect the restoration of a 6.5 percent across-the-board cut to all departments.

Based on discussions with the sheriff’s staff, “They have led us to believe that if we simply restore the (6.5 percent cut), they will be able to move forward without taking any drastic cuts to their 24/7 operations and most importantly, to the unincorporated patrol,” County Finance Officer Paul McDonnell told supervisors.

In an emailed statement, sheriff’s officials said relief from the 6.5-percent cut “allows the Sheriff’s Department to slow and then stop further decreases in staffing caused by attrition, but it does not repair the damage caused by that 10 percent workforce reduction over the past 20 months. It does avoid the forced choices of closing 24/7 operations for this fiscal year.”





1 min.

read

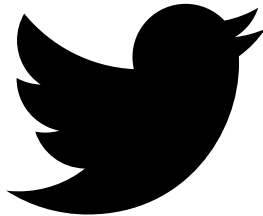
# Supervisor Tavaglione tells Sheriff Sniff to stop fighting Riverside County's cost-cutting efforts

At issue is how much  
Sniff's department is  
getting in the county's  
\$5.5 billion budget.



Created by The Press Enterprise  
on Jul 27, 2017





## More money

Some Riverside County departments are getting more funding in the county's \$5.5 billion budget, including:

**Sheriff's Department** – another \$17.9 million.

**District Attorney** – an additional \$6.1 million.

**Public Defender** – another \$4.3 million.

---

Tags: **public safety**,  
**Top Stories PE**

**Jeff**

**Horseman**

Jeff Horseman got into journalism because he liked to



write and stunk at math. He grew up in Vermont and he honed his interviewing skills as a supermarket cashier by asking Bernie Sanders “Paper or plastic?” After graduating from Syracuse University in 1999, Jeff began his journalistic odyssey at The Watertown Daily Times in upstate New York, where he impressed then-U.S. Senate candidate Hillary Clinton so much she called him “John” at the end of an interview. From there, he went to Annapolis, Maryland, where he covered city, county and state government at The Capital newspaper before love and the quest for snowless winters took him in 2007 to Southern California, where he started out covering Temecula for The Press-Enterprise. Today, Jeff writes about Riverside County government and regional politics. Along the way, Jeff has covered wildfires, a tropical storm, 9/11 and the Dec. 2 terror attack in San Bernardino. If you have a question or story idea about politics or the inner workings of government, please let Jeff know. He’ll do his best to answer, even if it involves a little math.

 Follow Jeff Horseman  
 @JeffHorseman

---

SPONSORED CONTENT

## 22-Minute Sesame Chicken

By Epicurious

**epicurious**

Epicurious' Food Director Rhoda Boone shows us that it really is

possible to make a meal in 22 minutes or less. With...

---

## VIEW COMMENTS

### Join the Conversation

We invite you to use our commenting platform to engage in insightful conversations about issues in our community. Although we do not pre-screen comments, we reserve the right at all times to remove any information or materials that are unlawful, threatening, abusive, libelous, defamatory, obscene, vulgar, pornographic, profane, indecent or otherwise objectionable to us, and to disclose any information necessary to satisfy the law, regulation, or government request. We might permanently block any user who abuses these conditions.

If you see comments that you find offensive, please use the “Flag as Inappropriate” feature by hovering over the right side of the post, and pulling down on the arrow that appears. Or, contact our editors by emailing [moderator@scng.com](mailto:moderator@scng.com).