



SHERIFF

KIT CARSON COUNTY

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Over the past couple weeks I have been asked about our traffic enforcement and have been told we have better things to be doing. I think this thought process stems from a lack of transparency between the Sheriff's Office and the community so let me explain why we do what we do.

Traffic enforcement is just a small part of what we do in our daily routine but none the less it is part of what we do. Our goal is never to go out and write a bunch of citations but rather to keep the community safe. Now to give this some context. Due to staffing levels we really didn't have any time for traffic enforcement until the last few months of 2021. When we do traffic enforcement we are always looking for the bigger issue. (ie impaired driving, drug trafficking, theft, etc.) Don't get me wrong speeding or reckless driving can be equally dangerous but most of the time those go hand in hand with whatever else is going on. Now lets look at impaired driving contacts from October 2021 through December 2021.

DUI Total	27					
Local	14	51.85%	Drugs	10	37.04%	
Non-Local	13	48.15%	Alcohol	15	55.56%	
			Both	2	7.41%	

27 seems like a relatively small number and breaks down to 9 a month. Now you multiply that by 4 for an entire year and now there's 108. 108 still looks like a small number but for this area that's a lot of impaired drivers. It would be hard to tell what the exact stats would be for local and non local drivers but I imagine it would be relatively equal.

Now lets look at the location of where these stops occurred. Of the 27 DUI's 10 of those were on I-70. The remaining 17 were on our county roads, local highways or in our towns. As you can see non local drivers weren't just on I-70. The community travels all of these areas on a daily basis so we can't just limit our patrolling to one or the other. Yes we have State Patrol on I-70 but they are spread as thin as we are. So now it becomes a team effort.

We do not go out looking for people who don't use their turn signal or have a license plate light out because lets be honest, out here a lot of people don't use a turn signal and surely don't worry about their license plate light not working. We are stopping for the violations that matter like speeding, weaving, etc. Those are just a couple of the violations that are consistent with impaired driving. And until we make that contact we have no way to know whether they're impaired or not. Now for someone like me who has spent 15 years working in this community I know that farmers and ranchers use the whole county road and a lot of times just based on the vehicle I know who's driving and know that that's just how they drive. But I have a fairly young crew and they are still learning and trying to do their jobs to the best of their ability at the same time. Community safety Encompass's a lot of things. My job is to make sure to the best of my ability that your family members are able to drive in this county and make it home without getting hit by an impaired driver. The last thing we want to have to do is come to your house and notify you that one of your loved ones was killed by an impaired driver.

Now I have had people say well that's just how people drive out here. Well yes that is true to a degree. But keep in mind we have to live with the decisions that we do or don't make. For example lets say we see a vehicle on a county road weaving a bit. Do we contact that vehicle or do we just chalk it up to that's how people drive out here?.....Say we chalk it up to that's just how people drive and 10 minutes later we are responding to a two vehicle accident because that person was actually impaired and hit a family head on and killed them. Knowing we could have prevented that situation but didn't because someone might complain would eat a hole in anyone. That right there is something that I never want to have on my shoulders nor any of my deputies. I always tell them to air on the side of caution, better safe than sorry. If you stop them and they're not impaired then no harm no foul but at least we made sure. That is us being thorough in our duties as Law Enforcement officers. Every time I stop an impaired driver I know that I just possibly prevented someone from getting killed, whether it's the impaired driver or someone just driving down the same road.

We do not automatically assume that every person that is weaving is impaired either. Distracted driving has become a huge issue and mimics impaired driving. But again until we make that contact we don't know if that's the case or not. Our jobs are a juggling act of trying to keep our community safe and not make the community mad at the same time. I learned long ago that we can't please everyone and everyone has an opinion about how we should or shouldn't do our jobs. In this day and age I am just thankful that I still have Deputies who want to do this job and care about keeping the community safe.

Then there's the citizen complaint initiated traffic enforcement. This is when a citizen complains about a specific street, road, etc regarding traffic speeding generally. This is a call for service just like anything else. When we get these complaints which are quite often we make it a point to do some traffic control in the specified area. So what happens when we do this, well again we end up trying to juggle between people who wants us there and people who think we have better things to do. For example citizen A complained and wants us to do extra patrol to stop the speeders. Then we make a traffic stop in that area on citizen B. Citizen B thinks it's stupid that we are running traffic in that area and tells us we have better things to do with our time. So what did we accomplish? We have on citizen that is thankful we are there taking their complaint serious and another who thinks we should be doing something else. It's a lose lose situation for us. If we don't do it then Citizen A thinks we don't care about their complaint. Either way someone isn't going to be happy.

My goal as your sheriff is to be more transparent and to keep the community better informed so you have context for why we are doing what we do. We are not a traffic focused agency and never will be. We definitely have a lot of other issues to deal with. We aren't perfect either and sometimes we get it wrong, but most of the time we get it right. I'm always available if there's an issue or complaint and I take those serious.

Sheriff Travis Belden