

DUI's and Unlicensed Drivers!

"Neighborhood Speak"-----by Steve Patterson—Federation of SR Neighborhoods

At a recent SR City Council Study session there was a presentation made by the key leaders in the SR Police Dept. The City received a state grant in 2008 to set up checkpoints throughout SR on select evenings to do checks for drunk drivers. These checkpoints have been set up throughout San Rafael since then without a focus on any one area.

The PD has also been careful to not target the Canal area so as to avoid being accused of "profiling". When these checkpoints are set up they also check for valid Driver's Licenses and for Insurance coverage. The PD presentation provided interesting statistics about the number of people who have been cited or discovered with no valid driver's licenses during these checkpoints. The PD indicated when unlicensed drivers are found, their cars are impounded for 30 days (state law) and there are hefty storage charges that must be paid to redeem their vehicles at the end of the 30 day period (\$45-50 per day).

The PD indicates that often unlicensed drivers are involved in hit/run accidents and that many injury accidents involve unlicensed drivers which can put hardships on those who are driving with licenses and insurance. In fact, unlicensed/uninsured drivers increases the cost of driving for all drivers since 75% of drivers with revoked or suspended licenses, continue to drive. 20% fatal accidents in Calif are due to unlicensed drivers. Checkpoints reduce accidents by 20%. And since the introduction of checkpoints, hit/run accidents are down 61% in San Rafael. So statistics indicate that along with pulling drunk drivers off the road, drivers who often are involved in high risk driving behaviors are also pulled off the road.

While the presentation did not indicate the ethnic mix of the unlicensed drivers who are cited and have their cars impounded, the perception is that most are Hispanics and many are undocumented. I personally have been a strong critic of the SRPD, but I found myself supporting their actions since what they are doing makes the roads safer in San Rafael for the residents. I was particularly supportive of the PD when numerous Social Justice types-aggressively questioned the police about their statistics and why they couldn't just stick to DUI enforcement while separating and ignoring the unlicensed driver enforcement. Three of the five city council members raised serious concerns about the "profiling" issue and seemed to favor NO enforcement of unlicensed driver laws.

To me this was a stunning reaction to a program to allow our city streets to be safer from serious accidents and hit/run incidents. But such is politics sometimes, when activists from Hispanic groups, the Marin Organizing Committee and other representative individuals from the Canal are present in the room. I found many of the Council comments to be "political grandstanding" to reinforce their perceived positions as progressives on issues, such as this.

I trust they will eventually determine that what the SRPD is doing is in the best interest of the overall community and what people want is to have our Public Safety policy in sync with the desires of the citizens. What is really progressive is providing Public Safety for ALL citizens in San Rafael and not trying to protect a segment of the population from state law enforcement under the guise that one ethnic group "may" be singled out.

I think most people in San Rafael want DUI driver and unlicensed/uninsured drivers OFF the road no matter what their predicament might be. One potential financial consideration is that a 30 day impoundment required by state law and the accompanying storage charges is currently being challenged in the appellate court. It does seem a bit harsh to insist on these type of financial penalties have to be part of an impoundment.

Bottom-line, however, is please keep our city streets safe for all residents at all times by removing DUI and unlicensed drivers. The state grants that are available for this enforcement is a very positive thing!

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