

The Pueblo Chieftain

Your print and online news source for Southern Colorado

Published: January 24, 2009

PD, sheriff break down OT for campaign visits

Obama, McCain and Biden stops in Pueblo cost \$38,000 in overtime pay for security assignments.

By NICK BONHAM
THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN



Jim Billings



Kirk Taylor

Taxpayers paid more than \$38,000 in overtime to Pueblo law enforcement agencies during presidential campaign stops this past election.

The majority of the overtime - \$29,645 - was generated by the Pueblo Police Department. The Pueblo County Sheriff's Department shelled out \$8,646.

"I'm shocked we spent that much more than (the sheriff's department) did," Police Chief Jim Billings said Friday when told of the overtime breakdown.

"We have a lot more flexibility with our 40-hour work week than the city does," Sheriff

Kirk Taylor said, adding he's made a strong effort to reduce department overtime. Taylor recently reported saving \$350,000 in overtime pay than what he originally budgeted for in 2008. Taylor said he was able to minimize overtime during the busy campaign season by adjusting personnel schedules, so that deputies could work security without surpassing their weekly work total.

Billings said he doesn't have the flexibility to switch and reschedule.

"It states in the (police department's contract with the officer's union) that an officer's schedule cannot be changed for the purpose of avoiding overtime," Billing said. "We were able to stay within our overall budget. We try to keep the overtime to a minimum for (presidential campaign) visits. But in terms of VIP protection, I think it's something we're pretty good at."

Billings said the amount of overtime was normal and noted that the handful of campaign stops here in 2008 reflects Pueblo's past as a popular political stumping ground.

Pueblo was visited four times during the past presidential election:

Sept. 15 - Future President Barack Obama as the Democratic presidential nominee spoke to 14,000 people at the Colorado State Fairgrounds.

Oct. 3 - Arizona Sen. John McCain spoke to 3,800 Republican supporters at Massari Arena on the Colorado State University-Pueblo campus.

Oct. 22 - Vice President Joe Biden drew 500 people at a rally of Democrats outside the Union Depot on B Street.

Nov. 1 - Obama revisited Pueblo, speaking to 16,000 at the intersection of Union Avenue and D Street.

The sheriff's office provided the main security at the Fairgrounds and at Massari Gym, venues in the department's jurisdiction. Both events cost \$4,323 each in overtime, Taylor said.

The Pueblo Police Department assisted the sheriff's office for Obama's first visit. That

cost the city \$11,790 in overtime, Billings said.

Obama's second visit, handled primarily by the police department, cost \$14,355 in overtime. McCain's and Biden's visits required less manpower and as a result, Billings said only about \$3,500 was paid in overtime.