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Commissioners not happy with high hotel room prices for Camporee

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Dozens out of people who will attend the 2024 International Pathfinder Camporee loaded into two buses and toured the facilities and town of Gillette in September 2023, one of many tours organized ahead of the event.

News Record File Photo

Rates for hotel rooms in Gillette skyrocketed as volunteers with the International Pathfinder Camporee booked reservations for the event that will be in Gillette from Aug. 5 to 11, and Campbell County Commissioners aren't happy about that.

During a Joint Powers Lodging Tax Board meeting last week, Commissioner Kelley McCreery said that the county's legal counsel has said these prices are just the result of a free market. But he worried about the precedent this would set.

"The way I see it, if they get away with it on this, anything that we have in the future that they know about, they can do the same thing," McCreery said.

"If there's a demand, is there a demand for hotel rooms to be \$400, \$500, \$600, \$700? This is what I want to know," Commissioner Butch Knutson said.

The Sturgis Motorcycle Rally will be going on at the same time as Camporee, and there's been word that rally-goers are able to book rooms at a lower rate.

"The word is they gave a better rate to the rally than they're doing for the Camporee. Is that true?" Knutson asked.

"It is true," said Jessica Seders, executive director of the Campbell County Convention and Visitors Bureau.

She pointed out that there isn't as much demand in Gillette for the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally as there is for Camporee.

She said that when the hotels have been approached about the rise in hotel prices, the response has been that "there was demand for the rooms, and demand is what caused the increase."

But beyond prices going up, the commissioners are concerned about another potential issue. Seders said she'd heard from Camporee that there were about 150 room reservations that were canceled.

"These were reservations with confirmations that were made a long time ago," she said.

There was a person with Camporee who kept track of emails that were sent back and forth with the staff at a hotel they'd booked a room at a while ago.

"They were told they didn't have the reservations anymore, and (the hotel) opened the hotel rooms back up and other Camporee folks took the rooms," she said.

Seders added that the rooms were re-booked at a higher rate than the original reservation.

Seders said other large events will be watching Campbell County as it hosts the Camporee, and that these issues aren't doing Gillette any favors.

Tom Lubnau, legal counsel for the lodging tax board, said he would meet with representatives of the county to look at some options regarding both of these issues.

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