

A long message..... but a very important topic that will help shape the future of public safety in Boone County

An open letter to the citizens of Boone County:

I would have never thought that only 19 months into my first term as your Sheriff that I would be proposing a tax increase. For those of you who really know me, you know that I have been and will continue to be adamantly opposed to any type of tax implementation. I take my job as a constitutional officer with much honor and respect. I assure you that I am well aware of the consequences and the challenges that this “hot topic” brings up with each of you. I also am very aware of the challenges that are facing our public safety in Boone County today. I would be remiss as your Sheriff if I did not take action to resolve the current issues facing us today. I take this request with the utmost seriousness.

I also want to assure each of you that I WILL NOT jeopardize the safety of the 64,000 citizens, the safety of the inmates that are entrusted in my care, and the safety of the staff that work with me every single day because of aspirations to become anything more than your Sheriff. If I were to make that type of decision then I would be compromising my integrity and my character, which is something I would never do....

As I have had both my integrity and character recently questioned in several public emails, it reminds me of just how misleading, uncaring and ruthless some people can be just to champion their cause. I believe in our humanity and I am so glad that these types of people are few and far between. I personally do not believe that the Office of Sheriff could be any more transparent than we are today. I have shared every financial detail of my five year strategic business plan and tax proposal. I have outlined the main components of the strategic business plan and have openly discussed how your tax dollars will be spent in many public forums.

Over the last several months I have planned, written, drawn, sat in countless meetings with vendors, met with financial analysts and staffing analysts, collected data, crunched numbers, met with the public, met with inmates, met with staff, presented to the public... all to plan and come up with a fiscally responsible strategic business plan to move the Boone County Sheriff's Office from a reactive law enforcement agency to an Intelligence Led Proactive Law Enforcement agency.

As one letter to the editor noted, “here is the Sheriff's rest of the story”. Well here it is folks, from the horse's mouth. I have never wavered on what my intentions were since I started this journey. I have always stated that we were looking between a rate of .25% and a rate of 1% additional Income tax. Absolutely there were several planning meetings with key people that were not publicly announced, it is because they **did not have to be** and were **neither unethical nor illegal**. I meet with vendors, contractors, suppliers, attorneys, commissioners, councilmen,

mayors, fire chiefs and police chiefs every single day to conduct business. These are the steps in planning and operating a multimillion dollar business such as the Sheriff's Office. They are critical to our success! These particular planning sessions have been no different than any other business that I conduct on a day to day basis – some would just like you to believe otherwise! I ask each of you to please base your very important decision on factual and complete information.

I cannot change how the legislators enacted this law to implement this tax. They made the rules and I am doing the best I can to follow them both legally and ethically. Please keep in mind that every municipality in our county will benefit from this income tax and that is why I engaged other municipalities in these planning sessions. This is not just about the Sheriff's Office. The municipalities simply needed to have input into this very important decision. Just because my strategic plan may not utilize the entire .5% rate does not mean that the public safety needs of these other agencies may not be greater. The .5% rate was a mutually agreed upon rate by the executive team that has been involved in the planning process. It clearly was within the range of what I have been talking about publically now for the last several months.

Here is what you may not know:

Being the Sheriff in the last 19 months has opened my eyes to just how critical of a point we are at today with public safety. For so many years, we have appeared in front of the county council at budget hearings to obtain funding for additional staffing and each year we are given that same response, "the county continues to outspend its revenues". We are working with staffing levels in most divisions that we were working with in 2004; this is simply not acceptable nor is it safe for everyone involved. Our calls for service (CFS) have increased each year with no additional deputies hired, our jail population is at an all-time high and our current Corrections staffing is way below standards.

The opiate and methamphetamine issue in this county continues to kill people and destroy families. I see it every day in many different venues from the street to those people that are in our jail suffering from this horrible addiction. We need to continue to look at ways to give our inmates hope when they leave our facility so they do not end up dead or back in our jail. This problem will simply not just go away without proactive law enforcement, staffing increases, and a commitment to look at other options of treatment and incarceration. It is so important to explore ways to reduce this recidivism rate.

Forty percent of our inmate population suffers from mental health issues; we need to provide better services for those that are suffering from this disease. Our crime continues to increase and we are currently watching our violent crimes rise with it. Our enforcement jurisdiction covers 424 square miles and we only have two deputies working the entire county at the same time, this is unsafe and does not allow us to quickly respond to our citizens. Our communications center is the heart of our operations, it is where it all begins, it continues to take over 165,000 calls each year and dispatch to all public safety agencies in the county. We have to increase our security

presence at all county owned buildings to make sure that we are protecting those that work in our buildings and visit our county buildings each day. Then we have to make sure that our most valued asset, our employees, are paid the competitive salaries they deserve to make sure we retain them for years to come.

We are now feeling the serious financial implications of the property tax caps that were put into place several years ago. I respect the County Council's position and their good stewardship but the Boone County Sheriff's Office can no longer sit back and only provide mediocre services at best because of our serious lack of staffing in many divisions. I personally decided last year after the budget hearings that we needed to partner with the County Council and provide the County Council an option for increasing revenues. We needed to be part of the solution instead of the problem. Thus, in the last several months, I have been working on this five year strategic business plan. This strategic plan will need to be funded over the next five years and beyond. It will be critical for these funds to be sustainable. Currently, the county reserve funds simply will not sustain or support this plan long term.

Folks, the Sheriff's Office simply has to change the way we are doing business today. The citizens of this county, the public that visit our county each day, our staff, and the inmates that we care for on a daily basis deserve better. We have to provide each employee with the best tools, manpower, and technology to perform their duties to the best of their ability. We simply can do much better than we are today!

I ask each of you this question:

What would you do if you were sitting in my position and had to make this decision?

Please go to this link to see some very important dates to attend. But more importantly, get informed of the reasons why I am pushing for this tax implementation knowing very well how much of an emotional subject that this is. I am your voice as your elected Sheriff. This is simply the right thing to do.

<http://www.boonecountyindianasheriff.com/Default.aspx?tabid=935>

Once you are informed please TAKE ACTION! Make phone calls; send emails to the County Council, County Commissioners, and to your Town Council members.

I ask that you help support our cause and let your voices be heard! If you can attend the County Council Public Hearing on September 13, 2016 at 10:00 am conducted at the Boone County Annex Building on the square....your support would be greatly appreciated! There will be an opportunity to speak if you choose to speak.

With great respect,

Michael D. Nielsen

Sheriff Mike Nielsen – Boone County Sheriff

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“In God We Trust”

**INTEGRITY~LEADERSHIP~LOYALTY~
PROFESSIONALISM~COMMITMENT**

