



Just the Facts!

The Board of County Commissioners And Me

Building a Relationship of Trust

It is not uncommon to hear stories about the poor relationships between the Board of County Commissioners and other elected officials, particularly the Sheriff. However, in Garfield County, nothing could be further from the truth!

The Constitution of the State of Colorado and the associated laws governing elected officials intentionally separate the use of powers. The Sheriff is not an employee of the BOCC, but rather an independently elected official by the citizens of the county. Although there have been attempts to modify this Constitutional arrangement into granting the BOCC the authority to set the salary of the Sheriff, each and every attempt has failed. During this current legislative session, there is again an effort to subvert a Sheriff's autonomy, but I have no doubt that it too will fail, as it should! Placing the salary of the Sheriff in a political trap such as this is an absolute violation of the intent of the Constitution. Elected offices, by their very nature, **MUST** act independently in order to protect the integrity of the system. A Sheriff who has to worry about making a decision contrary to the BOCC and consequently having his salary reduced as a penalty is an ineffective manager.

This discussion is not to suggest that the Sheriff acts with total autonomy. Our system's "checks and balances" that make the process work include the BOCC's authority over the county budget, including the Sheriff's. Although it is my responsibility to provide the statutory requirements of the Office of Sheriff, it is the BOCC's responsibility to ensure that my budget requests are within rational and reasonable expectations of our constituents. In other words, the BOCC has the budgetary authority to oversee the Sheriff's budget.

Over the past eight years, the BOCC and I have built a positive, trusting relationship regarding my budget. This rapport has taken time, experience and trust. When I first took office, the Sheriff's budget was scrutinized by a line by line approval process that required me to justify each and every expense. Every fiscal cycle, with the exception of a few unanticipated emergency expenditures, I have managed to stay within the scope of our budget. As a result, the BOCC has learned that I ask for what is needed to get the job done, not merely what is wanted.

I have always subscribed to the budget practice of “spend what you need and give the rest back,” which is why I was comfortable returning most of the \$2.1 million of unspent funds in my 2009 budget back to the county general fund. Some public officials feel that if they don’t spend it, they won’t get it next year. That philosophy is wasteful and in conflict with the public trust. Instead, I feel that I *gain* trust with the BOCC and the community by being frugal and always looking out for the budgetary interests of the taxpayers.

Per our vision statement of “See the Future and prepare for it Today,” the BOCC and I tried to anticipate what was needed to maintain the level of services that county residents expected from their Sheriff’s Office, particularly at a time when Garfield County was growing exponentially. I saw the need to improve Patrol response, Investigative services and add staffing to a jail that was experiencing consistent increases in its inmate population.

I also understood that the west end of the county, which was growing much more rapidly than the east end, was in need of quicker response times and access to administrative services. As a result, the BOCC and I agreed that a west-end facility was needed so that residents of the Parachute, Battlement Mesa, Rifle and Silt areas would be able to access the Sheriff’s office without the additional 50 to 100 miles of extra drive time. The new Rifle Annex will provide folks with the ability to access such services as having civil papers served, obtaining copies of reports, having fingerprints and VIN inspections performed, to name a few. It also provides us with much more storage space for evidence than is available in the poorly designed evidence area of the jail. Most importantly, it provides for future growth, something that the Glenwood Springs facility was never designed for when it was built in 2001.

This annex was a product of the County’s 5 Year Plan, taking the last three years to approve, design, budget through the capital fund and build. Ironically, even though we have seen our economy take a turn for the worse this past year, we have also found that a building previously budgeted with \$3.5 million in set aside funds received 17 competitive bids. The award to build totaled only \$2.6 million, with \$600,000 of that amount coming from a DOLA grant! Further, we found that there were a lot of local sub-contractors and workers we were putting back to work. The timing couldn’t have been better to save funds in the County budget or for the people employed on this project!

In the final analysis, it was the trusting relationship between the BOCC and me that allowed us to work together on a project that not only provided employment opportunities for some of our local construction industry, but will also provide long term assistance to a growing western Garfield County. And, it is this trust relationship between the BOCC and me that will allow us to continue to look into the future to provide the best professional services possible from the Sheriff’s Office to the people of our great county.

04/05/10