

## Tough Choices, Hard Decision

As I write this column I am really sympathizing with our religious leaders about how difficult it must be to ask their flock for more money. How do you introduce a concept that involves a reality that giving more money is necessary or a good thing for you to do. Most people I talk with want to hear about how much money is being saved-not how much money is being spent.

In our personal lives we all have money issues we have to deal with. What can we afford? What can we do without? What has to happen before a "want" becomes a "need"? What if we can't afford a "need"-then what? Sometimes it gets so frustrating that we don't want to deal with a money issue at all and put it off until we absolutely have to deal with it-there is no choice.

There isn't anyone in business or government that isn't faced with these same economic dilemmas as they prepare for their upcoming budget. This is the time of year I hear phrases such as difficult economic times, bad economic indicators, belt tightening objectives, shrinking capital investments, revolving outlays accounts, unfunded mandates, underfunded mandates, reduction in services, deficiency accounts, total salary package, increased demand for service, deficit budgeting, predicted consumer cost index, general fund expenditure and tax levy lift. It's a technical language all to its own.

As your sheriff, I am no different than any other administrator who appears at the county board budget hearings fighting as hard as I can to ensure the sheriff's department gets enough consideration to accomplish our mission of public safety. For 2013 I was asked to cut \$50,000 out of the sheriff's budget. If this request holds up through ratification, the sheriff's department's budget will have been reduced by \$167,660 over the last 4 years. When receiving this most recent budget reduction request I reminded the budgeting committee that continued reductions in the sheriff's budget at this rate will certainly compromise public safety, officer safety and create inevitable inefficiencies in the operation.

Quite simply put, continued budget reductions in public safety at the rate requested will prevent the sheriff's department from being a proactive and preventive organization to a reactionary and "priority call oriented" organization.

This change will not please many citizens or victims of crime. My belief is that as Sheriff, it is my obligation to inform the committee and the citizens of Richland County the consequences of continued cuts to law enforcement. I have shown the budgeting committee the financial needs of the department. I have also informed you, the public, how the cuts will affect the organization and your safety. You have a right to be informed!

You may ask, "Do I have to worry about getting an emergency response from the sheriff's department?" No, you don't have to worry about this. You may ask, "Will my call for non-emergency help be answered?" Yes, these calls for service will be answered also. What I do believe will change is our ability to conduct proactive and timely follow-up investigations, or do drug investigations or respond timely to reckless driving traffic complaints. Much like many other law enforcement agencies who have had their budgets extensively cut-these non emergency calls for service will be prioritized and addressed when staff is available. Cases will take longer to complete or resolve than in the past.

I believe we have a successful sheriff's department. That isn't going to change. The dedicated staff at the sheriff's department will continue to provide the best service that we can given our limitations. We will however spend a lot more time asking for your patience and understanding as we work through these difficult economic times together.

The budget committee will have a difficult task these next few weeks no doubt. It is a relatively new committee but so far I am impressed with the thought and leadership they are showing with their questions and trying to seek solutions and find answers during the budgeting process. Unlike some past years as I walked away from the budget hearings this year, I felt that they as a whole actually took the time to listen and try to understand the dangers of continued large cuts to the sheriff's department. What they do now remains to be seen. As they complete their budget work, my hope is that some funds can be found and restored back into the 2013 sheriff's department budget.