

Letter To the Editor

Editor's note: We normally limit letters to the editor in size and length but after reading Sheriff Mullen's letter I decided to print it in its entirety. The views and opinions expressed by Sheriff Mullen are not necessarily shared by the staff, management and ownership of The Stonewall County Courier and as always we welcome opposing viewpoints.

President Bush in one of his last conflicts called it Shock and Awe. I do not have such a catchy name for my conflict, I will simply call mine Unfortunate BS that I have put up with on a weekly basis for the past 6 or so years. So I decided to write this letter and submit it to the editor in hopes he would print it, and with your input I might find an answer or a better name for my problem.

My problem started almost six years ago, since that time I have made several attempts to correct it on my own, all I can say about that, it didn't turn out very good. But since I am accustomed to dealing with doom and gloom much of the time, I just shook it off and have continued on in the day to day operation of the Sheriff Dept.

To be fair and as informative as I can, one of my most recent situations started back on May 11, 2009. On this day I attended a grant workshop in Abilene to try and gain the knowledge and ability to apply for free money for the Sheriff Dept. that was being offered by the State. Of course, there were approximately 20 other agencies at the same meeting. After attending the meeting, everyone left with a packet of papers and hurried home to get started. After all, we were told that approximately \$850,000.00 would be distributed between 80 jurisdictions that compose the WTCOG area.

The next day I went over to talk to the County Judge about this grant to see if his secretary, who also attended the meeting could help me prepare the grant. The County Judge told me straight out that neither he nor his secretary would

help me; he said he would only support me. Since I had no grant writing experience, fearing I would mess up the entire process and not get any money I again asked for the Judge's help and again, in a political round about way was told no. Being quite disappointed I left and the next day begin working on the grant over the internet.

The completed grant had to be approved and submitted by June 1, 2009. I begin to work on it, answering questions to the best of my ability, with the help of Carolyn Putnam, who is employed by the West Texas Council of Governments in Abilene. I finally had it ready to submit on May 28th. As for the County Judge, he did call me a couple of hours before I submitted the grant to advise me that I had omitted or inappropriately answered some of the questions. Since the grant was being completed via the internet the Judge had full access to its progress. I suppose this was his support that he advised me he would contribute.

The Commissioners Court had to call a special meeting on May 29th to approve the submission of the Grant Application, at the close of this meeting, the Commissioners Court all voted for and gave the County Judge the authority or permission to apply for, accept, reject, alter, or terminate the grant on behalf of the Commissioners Court. After reading this in the newspaper this really concerned me. First, why would the Commissioners give this sole decision to the one person that refused to help me in the first place? Second, why did each Commissioner so quickly and freely give up their personal vote and decision making ability? I do not know how you as individual's feel about this, but I voted for my Commissioner to represent me as a citizen of the County. Regardless of how popular the decisions are that have to be made, I want my Commissioner to make that decision. If our Commissioners so freely gives their decision making power and vote to one person, then

why do we even need Commissioners to begin with. If any decision is made concerning the Sheriff Department or any other Official Office in the least way, I believe it should be up to the four Commissioners to make that decision by public vote, instead of just one chosen individual.

This bring up another item I would like to address. On numerous occasions I have asked individuals that sit on the Commissioners Court about different items and situations that have arisen, concerning the Sheriff's Dept. Many, many times I have been told by these same individuals (I did not know that, or I was not told that, or it was not explained to me that way) If this, being the case shouldn't this be the perfect example of what I'm talking about on being informed. I do not care who you are the only way to be totally informed about your job, task or ability to participate to the fullest in your position, is to be knowledgeable and informed on the matter at hand. Yes, sometime this can be very unhandy, but it is the job that you asked people to elect you to.

Another item that has plagued the Sheriff's Department for a number of years is keeping our bills paid in a timely manner. I realize I am stepping on toes, but it's not my Sheriff's Department, it is yours, the citizens of Stonewall County and I think it is only fair that you know some of the other things that I deal with for (you) serving as your Sheriff. Sure, we all can get behind when it comes to paying bills, but getting to the point to where a provided service is completely cut off or credit is denied for lack of payment should be totally unacceptable. I have tried to address this item more than once, but no matter what angle I try and pursuit to remedy this, I always end up being told it is (my fault). One of the most recent solutions I have been told by the County Judge was I should pay for (things out of my pocket) and turn in receipts for reimbursement. Folks, do you really believe I

should be subject to running the Sheriff's Dept. out of my personal pocket. I'll bet the County Commissioners do not have to operate maintainers and dump trucks for the County out of their personal pockets.

A few years back there was a called meeting of the elected officials in the meeting room of the courthouse, to try and determine ways to cut operation cost in the County. I being probably the only fool in the room that day stood up and said lets cut out COMP time. Here at the Sheriff's Dept. we have comp time. For those who don't understand just what this is, it is to let someone off work with pay (holidays) and then pay someone else to work for them. Other words, it is costing double to fill that position for that shift, when you could either pay overtime to the person or give the person the opportunity to choose to take the overtime or comp time. Other Counties around the area use this method, but not us (why?)

Basically, the only thing I learned at this meeting was to save money the Court had taken a deputy position away from the Sheriff's Department, without so much as a hello and they had hired one person in the Courthouse to work between the Tax Office and Clerk's Office. To clarify this, the two Offices would share the labor of this one individual. It now has been over 4 years since this was done and both the Clerk and Tax Office now have two employees each and I am still sitting here with one Deputy. Since this tie, the County has purchased a new caterpillar motor grader, loader, a couple of trucks, couple pickups and two belly dumps. I just can not see how they could not squeeze a salary out of all this for a Deputy. Folks, the Road and Bridge Dept. do an excellent job at maintaining our roads, we should be very grateful of this, but there are more things in running a county efficiently and safe than having smooth roads to travel.

Each one of you either has a place in the country or has family that does. Again good roads are essential to accessing your places, but isn't law enforcement just a little bit more important. It is a shame that the criminals can travel such good roads to vandalize and steal your things, when there is simply not enough time for me and one Deputy to cover, watch, or protect your things. Just knowing that might pop up at any time is a good deterrent itself, and two of us just can not cover the County as it should be. Somewhere in this process, I personally

believe the Counties priorities have become unbalanced.

Each time I have brought this subject up to the Court, I hear the same thing. (We have two Highway Patrols here) Highway patrol being the key words. Yes, Kipp and Brandon have been diligent about assisting us from time to time, but their loyalty lays with DPS, not the Sheriff's Dept. Their first and foremost obligation is with their Sergeant. We are very fortunate to have Kipp and Brandon, but in all honesty and with much respect you can not depend on them each time. They both have to adhere to a very strict schedule. Besides Stonewall County, they work in five other Counties as well. If you would ask them, they each will tell you the same thing.

The Dispatcher/Jailers that work for the Sheriff's Dept. are truly the backbone of the entire operation. No one, other than those that have done this type of work can truly understand the importance of this job. When you call needing help, you can always be assured that the voice on the other side is there to help. Sometimes that could be the difference between life and death. Of all the County employee jobs, to become a Certified Jailer/Dispatcher is the hardest to achieve. To meet the State's qualifications alone is hard, not to mention the physical training,

testing and schooling that is mandatory. Then add the Department of Public Safety telecommunications training and cover all this with constant 911 training. I can assure you that to work in a Sheriff's Department, as small as ours is not for everyone. It truly takes a special type of person to do this type of work. For years, I have tried to get the Court to realize this and pay these people a wage that truly reflects on their qualifications and training, instead of paying them like they were fast food employees. I have yet managed to achieve this. Perhaps with some outside input they might realize the true importance of these employees.

I suppose my most misunderstood conflict has been with the County Judge. Years back, I would have considered him a close friend and ally in law enforcement, but unfortunately about 6 years ago things between us completely deteriorated. After realizing this had happened I personally tried to seek out what the trouble was. One night along about this same time, while sitting in the Sheriff's Office, the Judge told me that part of the trouble was I had been telling everyone that I was running for the Judge's Office, and ridiculing the job he was doing. I attempted to assure him this was the furthest thing from my mind. I told him he could not produce one individual who I had told such. Looking back now, I really do not care. But at the time, I was concerned that someone could so blatantly misuse their friendship with him, when the only purpose was to destroy the working relationship, and friendship between him and me. The Judge knew me well enough that if I had a problem with him I would try and resolve it with him first. I even have attempted this on a couple of different occasions since then, but it did not work well either, only ended up worse than before.

I do take the job of Sheriff very seriously, when I see the Sheriff's Department being put on the back burner, I take that even

more serious. Just one example of this, is in June of 2008, the roof blew off our storage shed just adjacent to the Sheriff's Office. I have followed protocol, reported it, turned in bids, reported it, and so forth. It has been a year and still I haven't received the OK to have it repaired. You don't have to like me, but this is an Official County Office and it deserved the same courtesy and respect as any other office. It is funny how a lot of people really don't think much about the Sheriff's Dept., until they need assistance in some manner. We don't close on Holidays, or maintain courthouse hours. We are here 24 hrs. a day, 7 days a week for you. I refer to it as the Hawk sitting on the lone post trying to watch the entire field for a mouse. And yet somebody is always driving by and taking a cheap shot at us. Causing us to have to fly off and circle a couple of times before landing back on our post.

No matter if you like me or not you know that if you need me, I will be there ready to support, fight or defend you to the bitter end. I attribute a lot of my personal beliefs to the way I was raised. I was taught that if you make a mistake, to try harder the second time, for some of us it might even mean taking a third attempt, but just don't keep doing it half-way. This has worked well for me and I will continue to do this as long as able.

I like my job and will continue to do this as long as you will continue to have me. I only ask one thing of you, that is pick up the phone and call, or go by and visit with your Commissioner, ask a few questions, find out who, why and what's happening. You know they did not mind coming by and asking you for a vote and they should not mind taking a few minutes to discuss some of the issue that I have brought to your attention. If you will do this one thing, not only might it inspire them, but it could benefit the entire community.

I hope that I have sincerely stirred some type of positive emotions in you that will and can unite us.

Living in a small community like we do, our number-one goal should be to adhere to one purpose and that is to help peace and harmony prevail.

Sincerely,
Bill Mullen Sheriff
Stonewall County