

**U.S. SENATE SUBCOMMITTEE ON EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS OF FEDERAL PROGRAMS  
AND THE FEDERAL WORKFORCE**

***“A MORE EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE GOVERNMENT: EXAMINING EFFORTS TO ADDRESS LAW  
ENFORCEMENT, INFRASTRUCTURE, AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN THE BAKKEN”***

**TESTIMONY OF JOHN K. DYNNESON**

**SEPTEMBER 26, 2014**

[1] Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. Senator Tester’s invitation was addressed to long-time Richland County Sheriff Brad Baisch. Sheriff Baisch requested that I, in my capacity as a current Deputy Officer, testify before you today as a representative of the Richland County Sheriff’s Office. My testimony includes viewpoints and concerns of all local law enforcement, which I am familiar with in my capacity as President of the Richland County Law Enforcement Association and my current position as Coroner for Richland County. I am honored to provide my testimony to you all today.

[2] As a lifetime resident of Richland County, my parents were personally involved in the original oil boom of the 1950s, my wife and I experienced the effects of the boom and bust of the 1980s, and my family and peers are impacted by the current oil activity in our region. These impacts hit home to all of us in this area—it has impacted nearly every aspect of our daily lives.

[3] In dedicating over thirty years to various levels of our local law enforcement, I have been involved with a number of serious undertakings. A few of the most recent issues that strike in the hearts of our communities relate to (1) the unexpected event involving Sherry Arnold’s disappearance that required extensive cooperation, coordination, and intensive involvement among local, county, state, and federal officials here and across the state border, and (2) the investigation and take-down of a large drug ring that resulted in numerous arrests after time-consuming coordinated efforts among various agencies of law enforcement.

[4] I was specifically asked to address the infrastructure needs of our agency as a result of its location within the Bakken region. In conjunction with the needs, I was requested to make mention of the resources and focus that we as the local agency devote to addressing these needs as well as related collaborative efforts provided by local, regional, and state partners. Further, I was asked to address how the lack of infrastructure in Richland County and the greater Bakken region impacts the ability of our agencies to carry out its law enforcement responsibilities.

[5] A common theme echoed by many in this region is the need for an increase in experienced staff and staff that is able to afford the living situation in this region long enough to stay and obtain the necessary experience to effectively serve our communities. Though our sheriff’s office and local police departments have some outstanding individuals willing to serve, our continued commitment to effectively serve our communities requires more officers, jail staff, and dispatchers. These are just a few of the employment opportunities available and necessary to

facilitate the work our law enforcement agencies are expected to undertake and provide. Finding individuals willing to work in these areas rather than seek higher paying “oil-field” employment is difficult.

[6] Besides finding an experienced person and locating others willing and able to dedicate adequate time to train the person, multiple obstacles still stand in the way. Housing infrastructure—though slowly increasing—is still lagging. Increased construction of housing units does not remedy the issue of “affordable housing”. With housing prices at an alarming rate in this region in relation to comparable housing in other parts of the country, our local agencies and departments are faced with budget concerns and the need to provide further monetary assistance or a housing subsidy to address these needs of prospective and existing personnel. It is not only the high cost of housing that astonishes people, but everything here is limited and comes with a price. The costs associated with living in the region, including groceries, home repairs, vehicle maintenance, and childcare, are unprecedented compared to many areas of the United States and our state. What the state and federal government does not see is that adequate childcare is extremely limited. Enticing the right recruits to join our local agencies is difficult enough without mentioning all of the accompanying hardships these potential employees may face for themselves as well as their families.

[7] Though an influx of people has come to our region, it is not enough to go out into the street and pick a person to serve in these capacities. We can and are willing to train people that come here without education or experience. Even when we find the right person, our agency expends money, resources, and manpower to actually conduct effective training by existing personnel. Months of effort, thousands of dollars, and a multitude of man hours go into training personnel that, ultimately, are forced to leave because of the excessive costs associated with living here. We have tried to better train and facilitate experiences of our employees by training locally and providing extensive training expected by our personnel. Yet, it appears that we continue to lose ground in manpower and experience.

[8] Logically, the increase in population comes with a growth in crime, increased instances of abuse, mental health concerns, growing numbers of homeless, and other strains on local infrastructure, as well as other unsavory ideas, such as organizations coming to this area that support criminal activities. Currently, all of our local and state agencies work together to address the impact on our communities. These agencies include Mental Health, Child and Family Services, Sidney Health Center, and the Richland County Coalition Against Domestic Violence, and other service agencies. All of these agencies are affected by the same issues as law enforcement: concerns with affordable housing and lack of experienced personnel willing and able to live and work in this area of the Bakken region and lack of childcare.

[9] We are also limited in physical workspace, equipment needs, and judicial resources. Taking a more desirable proactive approach—which is expected by our citizens—affects our community by putting a strain on court resources and jail space. I recognize that across our

country much of the judicial and law enforcement systems likely experience similar concerns; however, it appears that our region is impacted at an unprecedented level. The local agencies have tried to alleviate some of the concerns by sharing space and resources. The Richland County Sheriff's Office and the Sidney Police Department have shared space since the 1970s. The Fairview Police Department has a physical space of its own in Fairview. All of the agencies are willing (but not always able) to make their spaces available to one another.

[10] Particularly of note is the new Richland County Law and Justice Center and jail that was constructed in Sidney within the past few years. This facility provides physical space to the Richland County Sheriff's Office, Sidney Police Department, Montana Highway Patrol, Federal Bureau of Investigation, and Montana Division of Criminal Investigations. It has added a much-needed increase in physical space to our law enforcement entities and substantially heightened the security expected and required for the issues we address and the persons we are incarcerating. Though the facility—thanks to Richland County—has provided these valuable resources, our agencies are already feeling a strain. In planning the facility, it was anticipated to serve the area for many years; however, with the increased activity, the jail population is at capacity and space for personnel and staff is limited.

[11] It is worth noting that all of the city, county, and regional agencies have a long history of using collaborative efforts to prepare cases, proactively work investigations, and to utilize preventative efforts to limit the impact on this region. I have had experience working with each of these agencies at least once during my career. We appreciate their expertise and cooperation when necessary, as well as their willingness to seek our assistance where our agency is better-suited to address the needs of this community. Regionally, the State of North Dakota Bureau of Criminal Investigation provides a means for working and sharing information with others in the Bakken across the state line, including the City of Williston, Williams County, and McKenzie County. All of the communities in our region—which appears to include almost every local and county agency from Billings, Montana to Minot, North Dakota—understand the importance of working together to protect our residents and provide law enforcement needs.

[12] At the state level, the Montana Highway Patrol works with our agency by primarily providing highway safety but also facilitating with drug interdiction and coverage at motor vehicle crash sites. The Montana Division of Criminal Investigations has area coordinators and investigators to, among other things, assist with narcotics work and criminal investigations. The Montana Army and Air National Guard Counterdrug Unit has provided case analysis support to our local law enforcement. Additionally, the federal entities willing to work with our agency in multiple aspects of law enforcement include United States Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, United States Customs Agency, United States Border Patrol, the Drug Enforcement Agency, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

[13] With all of the efforts of local, state, and federal agencies and entities, we still have many obstacles in this region. Obviously, we appreciate the collaborative efforts and undertakings to

date. As most law enforcement agencies can attest to, we are always in need of money for updating equipment and for increasing staff. Besides assistance with funding and personnel for the actual work of undertaking law enforcement, it would be appropriate to provide monies and resources to applicable entities (nonprofit, governmental, and private agencies) that can assist in remedying the “affordable housing” issues of this area. Our region also needs monetary assistance and efforts to support local childcare programs, including viable after-school programs and daycares.

[14] Our agency needs the assistance of the FBI here because the FBI has the time and resources that are necessary to devote to particular types of higher profile cases that the local and county law enforcement agencies cannot match at this time. Currently, the FBI rotates officials through this region based on temporary duty. From my observations, I believe it would be helpful if FBI personnel were assigned to this region as a permanent position. Though our local and state officials continue to do a great job in their work in this region, the permanent FBI official would provide much-needed assistance to cities and counties in eastern Montana. Besides assisting local law enforcement, the FBI officials would be expected to proactively investigate and assist in prosecuting federal crimes that are committed in this region, which would primarily consist of, but would not be limited to, drug investigation, human trafficking, and white collar crime. If permanent officials were assigned here, it would likely require a federal stipend or some type of assistance to deal with the high cost of living in this region.

[15] In addition to the FBI, other federal agencies may require financial and personnel increases in to order to effectively serve the Bakken Region. It may not be necessary for dedicated personnel to be stationed in our city or in our county; however, setting up a task force and appointing personnel to assist in protecting our region would be helpful. This increased presence would aid local entities in dealing with crimes that surpass the capacity of available local personnel, provide additional expertise, and cover issues outside the bounds of the local jurisdictions.

[16] We appreciate the Subcommittee’s consideration of our testimony today, and we are hopeful that our emphasis on these issues will lead to further assistance from the federal government and appropriate agencies. Though our local law enforcement personnel is dedicated to doing everything it can to protect the residents of this county and the Bakken region, we welcome further collaborative efforts, financial support, and additional resources in order to more quickly remedy the issues affecting our personnel, our agencies, and, most importantly, the residents of Richland County.