

**" Taking Back Our Community" meeting well attended (KLZA)--Well over 100 people from all over Richardson County attended a meeting at the Richardson County Law Enforcement Center Wednesday evening hoping for answers concerning the amount of crime in the County.**

**Bob Witt of rural Falls City has become the lead person for the "Taking Back Our Community" group recently formed. Witt says the goal is to rid our communities of crime, thinking about our kids and grandchildren.**

**Invitations for the meeting were sent out to law enforcement personnel, city and county leaders and both local and state elected officials.**

**The Richardson County Sheriff's Department, Falls City Police Department, Nebraska State Patrol, County Attorney Doug Merz and Deputy Samantha Scheitel all attended as well as other City and County officials.**

**There were a number of topics that seemed most upsetting to audience members, including the sentences for drug-related crimes that do not result in prison time, plea agreements that drop felony charges to misdemeanors and the frustration of the number of thefts occurring.**

**Law enforcement personnel expressed their displeasure with light sentences. County Attorney Doug Merz said the prison overcrowding issue has affected the ability of prosecutors to attain prison sentences for some. Merz said "1st time offenders for non-violent crimes, almost never go to prison for that offense."**

**Merz also noted that with limited access to days the judges are in rural counties, it is impossible to push to convict every crime and sometimes, plea agreements are saving tax dollars.**

**Sheriff Don Pounds, a long-time critic of the so called "light sentences" says most of the crime is driven by drugs. He urged the public to help law enforcement however they can. He suggested watching your neighborhood because you know when strange vehicles are around. The sheriff said getting plate numbers is important. He said people could also get in groups of three or four and drive around watching for suspicious activities.**

**The TBOC group is gathering phone numbers and hopes to set up social media programs to let those interested know when cases are going to court so people can go to the proceedings as a way to let judges know they are fed up with the "light" sentences.**

**Pounds said even if you are afraid of getting involved, you can make anonymous calls to law enforcement, but said the calls need to be made in a timely manner, deputies are out 24-hours a day. He said “when criminals know they are being watched, they move to another area and hopefully out of state.”**

**Pounds said in his years with the Nebraska State Patrol and now as Sheriff, the best example he has witnessed in how the public can work together with law enforcement is Mothers Against Drunk Driving. He said their organization would be a good blueprint to utilize to help work on the crime problems.**

**Lonnie Conley, Commander of the Nebraska State Patrol Investigative Services Division, said that while there is no drug task force in place currently due to a lack of funding, agencies do work together. He said “it's not like television, law enforcement can't just go break down a door and make arrests. We have to follow the rules.”**

**Witt encouraged everyone to think about the problems and try to come up with solutions that can be shared. The next meeting of the Take Back Our Community group will likely be after the 4th of July.**

Many Signals Communications