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## **GUEST EDITORIAL: Support police tools, department as a whole**

by Dale Beeks ·  
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Law enforcement has been in the sights of the sensationalist national press for many years. From stories about beatings by rogue cops, deaths by taser, to in-depth scandals; it all makes for great headlines. The press loves cultivating a gullible public; it's like a foot-in-the-door to the milking barn. In my opinion, it's much better to educate ourselves from more accurate pragmatic based sources, especially when dealing with local issues. I believe the people in our community are very capable of doing just that.

What is it about law enforcement that inspires people to become defensive and embrace a stereotypical attitude of defiance toward rules and those who enforce rules? What makes people desire to have their livelihoods protected and then refuse the very people they pay for protection the tools to be effective? What is it that makes some people cringe when being approached by a cop, the very person we trust to help us in times of distress? Is it the intimidating military type uniform cops sometimes wear? The firearms cops carry? Is it the glorified corruption and misuse of power promoted by Hollywood style media?

It's time to use our talents and education as members of the community, with the goal of promoting awareness about the good in law enforcement, the good in those who choose to serve our community. It's time to trust the capabilities of our officers to skillfully use judgment and make decisions about high stress interactions on their watch. It's time for a change.

This "cop" topic extends well beyond the recent debate about law enforcement's needs for tools; however, I would like to briefly add to this discussion. The taser is one of very few practical, non-lethal options for a law enforcement officer. It is a common tool for law enforcement in communities of our population and demographics (the City of Lisbon owns two tasers).

The taser is effective in stopping a real threat with minimal damage to the citizen engaged in the criminal act, the officer, and the innocent bystanders. How is it that some of our council members see this as "not essential?" Would they prefer to deal with the trauma of a death in our community?

These city council members need to role-play the position of an officer in an alley at 2 a.m. dealing with a potential threat. Is it a knife-wielding drunk or someone urinating behind a dumpster? Is it perhaps a good old-fashioned bar fight? Has anyone experienced living in a community with little or no law enforcement? Like most communities, Mount Vernon can be a different place after 1 a.m. For example, the situation where someone was holding a person at knife point at a fast food restaurant. Sound familiar? If it wasn't for the patience and training of Sergeant Doug Shannon, this situation could have turned very ugly, with both victim and suspect killed.

All of our city government personnel have an open invite to ride with our officers. Maybe a firsthand look at Mount Vernon's early morning "night life" should be a requirement for our city council members so they may be more in-touch to the needs of our officers. Without being exposed to everyday cop situations, who are we to judge their needs and who are we to rise up against their request for well researched, efficient, and non-lethal tools? I believe

it's time for us to put faith in our officers' professional training and experience, and respond to their requests with a background of knowledge stemming from education and experience instead of an idealist academic attitude.

Finally, for too long, there has been a gross imbalance in funding and wages in our city government. This unfair division of our city budget has forced our law enforcement officers to take the short end of the stick when it comes to a decent wage. These dedicated citizens of our town have been putting up with this mistreatment for over a decade. According to our public records, it costs the City of Mount Vernon over \$8,000 per officer to send them through the police academy and outfit them with uniforms and equipment. On top of these costs are wages paid during training. Over the past eight years we have lost seven officers to better wages in other communities. That's a loss of a minimum of \$56,000 of our law enforcement budget.

Obviously, we have had more than a few instances of poor judgment by those individuals in our city government, who are in charge of securing an adequate wage for our officers. Citizens of Mount Vernon, let your voice be heard by the city.

Most of our current law enforcement officers are citizens of Mount Vernon. These people have chosen to be active members of our community, to live here with their families, in part because they recognize and appreciate the same qualities of livelihood that we all enjoy in Mount Vernon. Yet, the "cops" are often treated as outsiders. As a community, we should recognize the benefit of our law enforcement officers feeling welcome in our city, not like temp employees or worse yet, one step above a-necessary-evil.

I suggest that we take a step back in order to get a more objective perspective and take a very close look at where our money is being spent. Law enforcement needs to be moved up the priority list. What these officers do for a living bolsters the very quality-of-life we all enjoy in our town. These services we take for granted are valuable, and the people who perform these services are respectable citizens of our community.