

# What has Dahl Bradfield Done for Lincoln County?

## Questions Are Raised About The Sheriff's Leadership Over The Past Six Years

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Law enforcement in a remote, sparsely populated county like ours is a difficult undertaking. We can never afford enough deputies to adequately cover our vast territory, so maintaining the law here must be a cooperative undertaking between the Sheriff's Dept. and the people. In a sense, every citizen in Lincoln County is a deputy--the eyes and ears of the Sheriff--but this system can work only when mutual trust is maintained and the people feel that the Sheriff's Dept. is working for their best interest.

The Sheriff's position is to a large extent diplomatic, as a liaison to the community to assure that trust between officers and the people is maintained. For the law to work in this county, the Sheriff must be seen as even-handed, unbiased and above the fray of politics. He should use the enormous power of his office only with the utmost discretion, taking care to avoid both the fact and appearance of any favoritism, enmity or conflict of interest.

As the Nov. 8 election approaches, voters must ask: Has Dahl Bradfield lived up to these expectations?

In the past two years, Lincoln has been divided by two bitter and costly conflicts and embarrassed by a third. These are:

- [The recall of Floyd Lamb.](#)
- [The failure of the Detention Center.](#)
- [The clashes between deputies and journalists at the border of Area 51.](#)

In each case, we find that Sheriff Bradfield has not held his department above the fray of politics but seems to have jumped into it without reserve.

### Floyd's Recall: Behind the Scenes

A lot of people don't like Floyd Lamb. He is abrasive and opinionated, and long ago, before being elected commissioner, he was convicted in a bribery scandal. Floyd seems to have irritated enough voters that when a recall election was held a few months ago, he was defeated by a slim margin. The people have spoken, and at his age Floyd probably won't be back.

What most voters didn't see is how the recall came about. The majority of signatures to force a recall election were collected by Sheriff's deputies and their families, including the Sheriff's wife. In a county with one of the largest per-capita police forces in the country, deputies and their families are a powerful political bloc. Theirs was a coordinated effort, and they could not have conducted this campaign without approval of the Sheriff himself.

What was Floyd's crime? It is still not clear. Floyd called Dahl a "liar" at a commissioner's meeting and clashed with him repeatedly over the failing Detention Center, which Floyd felt Dahl was being deceptive about. Floyd was also accused by the state of "violating open meeting laws" for a few casual words spoken after a commissioner's meeting. The words themselves seem trivial and were reported to the state by an anonymous county employee who has never come forward. Floyd and another commissioner received a mild reprimand from the state, but only Floyd was targeted for recall.

What was Floyd's real sin? Some say he was brought down because he was one of the few people in the county willing to stand up to Sheriff Bradfield.

Whether or not you like Floyd, there is cause for concern when one county official can force the recall election of another, using his own employees to collect signatures. The situation looks even worse when those employees carry the power and authority of a police uniform. How many citizens signed the petition, not because they opposed Floyd, but because they did not want to anger the deputies and face perceived recrimination? What happened may or may not have been illegal, but it certainly conveyed the appearance of a conflict of interest by Bradfield and his deputies.

## **Detention Center: Money Down the Drain**

Without question, the failure of the Detention Center was the worst financial debacle in Lincoln County since Pioche's Million Dollar Courthouse. Some have dubbed it "The Jail That Ate Lincoln County."

Championed by Sheriff Bradfield as a way for the county to make money housing other people's inmates, this state-of-the-art prison, far in excess of the county's own needs, had to be abandoned this year for lack of prisoners. Although construction itself was paid for by a private company, the cost to the county was enormous. Hundreds of thousands of dollars of our tiny county's budget were squandered on operating and start-up expenses for this "for profit" venture that, in retrospect, the county should never have been engaged in.

To be fair, Bradfield should not accept blame alone. Three commissioners, Ed Wright, Keith Whipple and Lenard Smith, were also persuaded to go along. Still, the Detention Center would never have happened without Dahl's backing. In addition to helping pay for local law enforcement, the Detention Center, if successful, would have greatly increased the power of the Sheriff's Dept. As the Sheriff's headquarters, the new building would have been envy of police everywhere and would have been far more palatial than any other county office.

Call it bad luck that the prisoners never materialized, but the Detention Center is still part of Bradfield's record. It is, and will always be, a reflection on his judgment, ethics and style of operating.

## **Area 51: Defending the Feds**

Area 51, Lincoln County's own "base that doesn't exist," has been in the news a lot lately. Unfortunately, a lot of what we have seen on television and read in the newspapers is Sheriff's deputies frisking reporters, Sheriff's deputies seizing video tapes of national TV news crews and Sheriff's deputies arresting naive tourists who have wandered across the unfenced military border. As far as can be determined, ours is the only public police force in the country that has taken upon itself to represent and defend a secret federal entity that will not admit its own existence.

During Bradfield's tenure, the Sheriff's Dept. secretly deputized base security guards and accepted secret complaints from federal officials to investigate tourists on public land. Whenever the feds call, deputies respond immediately, even if this means leaving Alamo without any police protection. The compensation the county has received for this service has been minor--only \$50,000 a year--while the drain on county resources is significant.

Voters should ask, Why can't federal marshals perform these duties, since Area 51 is a federal facility? Some also ask, Who really controls the Sheriff's Dept., the county taxpayers or the federal government? The Sheriff's Dept. has never informed the voters of its extensive federal involvement, and Bradfield has refused to discuss it.

## **Perceptions**

Effective law enforcement depends on the trust of the community in its police officers. Perceptions are as important as fact here, because they determine whether a citizen will cooperate with the police or work against them. Unfortunately, under Bradfield, perceptions have not been good.

There is, among many county residents, a perception that law enforcement is selective, focusing on critics of the Sheriff. There is a perception that some deputies are out of control and need better supervision. There is a perception of repeated conflict of interest by the Sheriff in promoting his political agenda. Finally, there is the perception that anyone who opposes Bradfield will suffer retribution just like Floyd did.

November 8 will be the only opportunity voters have to address these perceptions. Whatever choice we make, we will have to live with it for the next four years, and there is no sense complaining about it afterwards. This is the time when we have to think things through and make the right choice.

Other candidates may be unknown, but Sheriff Bradfield has a record and must be judged by it.

## **We Cannot, in Good Conscience, Re-Elect Dahl Bradfield**

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