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As elected and appointed officials who have been chosen to serve as leaders within our communities throughout Routt County, we must be proactive to ensure the safety and security of our schools. We cannot afford to sit idle and wait for the unlikely possibility of our State or Federal governments to find solutions to prevent these horrific active shooter situation from reoccurring.

During the past 2 decades, our country continues to experience active shooter scenarios with increasing frequency. Public schools seems to be a main target of choice for these deranged, psychopathic killers. Why? Because they are soft targets where defensive mechanisms are often non-existent. We cannot continue to keep our heads buried in the sand hoping that an active shooter situation does not happen here. If we ignore what is happening around us or wait for someone else to find the solution, more lives will be lost to these senseless acts of violence. As leaders, we must put our thoughts and resources together and find a way to protect our children and teachers.

Active shooter scenarios are very complex and cannot be attributed to any one particular cause or reason. Because of the complexity, there is no easy or cheap solution to stop them from occurring again. For to many years, these scenarios have been politicized and the finger pointing begins in an attempt to find blame or pinpoint the cause of these horrific incidents. If we allow politics to take the lead, division will likely take place dividing us as Americans and nothing will be accomplished to prevent more attacks.

Data and research shows that these deranged killers seek soft targets because there is nothing to stop them from executing their evil acts of upon defenseless children. Often, active shooter situations are over in just a few minutes and once the cowardly shooter receives any level of resistance, they often give up or commit suicide. By this time, death of the innocent is usually high in numbers and the damage is done. There are no additional laws we can pass and posting more signs stating this area is a gun free zone is not going to stop one of these evil killers from doing the unthinkable.

Some politicians and the anti-gun/pro gun groups waist precious time and resources turning these horrific events into a gun debate in lieu of finding an effective deterrent. The suggestions for solving the problem to this point, have resulted in nothing more than civil rights arguments and debates. The fact that these incidents occur is evidence that it is impossible to legislate the evil minds or intent of a person through the establishment of a law or rule!

As a career law enforcement officer, I see one possible solution. We must establish a clear, robust form of defense that sends a clear message to a deranged, want-a-be killer, "if you try to harm our students and teachers, you will fail and most likely die in the process"!!! We MUST be proactive and establish a front line of defense so our children and teachers can go about their daily lives concentrating on education, not living with the stress wondering if today might be the day they experience an active shooter situation.

Locally, we have made good progress in helping our schools safety by performing threat assessments, recommending policy changes and enhancing the physical structure of our school facilities but this is not enough. The solution will not be free but we cannot put a price on our children's or teacher's lives.

It is past time we establish a program to place well trained, armed school marshals in every public school. Most every city and county has active or retired law enforcement personnel or retired military personnel who would make excellent school marshals. Both law enforcement and military personnel have been trained to engage dangerous situations straight on and will not hesitate to act when necessary. They are trained to recognize out of the ordinary, strange or aggressive human behavior as well as training in less lethal, hand to hand, close quarter and other combative scenarios.

A school marshal candidate should be screened and must submit to a hiring process similar to the process other law enforcement officers go through. These processes normally consist of a minimum of a written test, skills test, physical exam, oral board assessment, polygraph exam and psychological exam. The position should fall under the authority of the local law enforcement agency whether a police department or sheriff's office. The position should not be considered as a school resource officer (SRO) position but strictly for the purpose of campus safety and security. A school marshal and SRO have two totally different objectives and the two should not be mixed.

To avoid the argument or concern of having a military appearance to our schools, school marshals do not have to appear overly tactical or trooper like but dress to appear as a normal citizen. The ability to conceal the tools of their trade is quite easy with appropriate attire. Example- The president is constantly surrounded by secret service personnel. They are well armed and capable to deal with most any threat but most people would never know it. A marshal can appear as a normal as any citizen as to not bring undue attention to themselves or to stand out in a crowd. The element of surprise is always something the good guys want on their side.

While others are political grandstanding, let us work together and lead the way to prevention. If we establish and make it well known that we (Routt County) have guardians in each and every school, the evil cowards who commit these heinous acts will be much less likely to target one of our schools for fear of their own demise.

The question in everyone's mind is, "Who or how are we going to pay for the program"? If we put our minds and resources together, I feel confident we can find a method to fund the program. Once the funding mechanism is established, we can go to work on developing a well-organized program as well as the cost of implementation. Simply put, we cannot afford the risk or not trying.

I believe the majority of our citizens regardless of personal or political philosophy could support a small tax or mill levy increase specifically designed to pay for the school marshal program. I have put together some basic cost estimates using a RCSO deputy position as an example. Assuming my estimated cost to fund 1 school marshal for each school is accurate, I am confident it can be accomplished for around \$90,000 to about \$120,000 per school. This estimate would include a decent wage, insurance, benefits, quality training, the marshal's equipment and clothing allowance and other related costs.

There are possibly several mechanisms to pursue funding through either the individual school districts or based on a countywide tax. My preliminary and very basic estimates based on 13 public schools located throughout Routt County using an average of \$105,000 per school, indicates a total estimated cost of \$1,365,000 per year to fund all the public schools in the county. Using the 2017/2018 demographics of Routt County for total households of 9,892 would indicate a tax increase of \$137 per year, per household. Keep in mind these figures are very basic but gives us a start.

I believe the taxpaying citizens of Routt County have a right to help decide possible solutions as well as funding sources for preventative solutions to these issues. We need to do our due diligence to research and provide some options to our citizens.

As the elected sheriff of Routt County, I feel I need to lead this discussion and try to find a solution to this ongoing safety problem we all know exists. A situation like we have witnessed lately has not happened here and I want to do everything I can to make sure it never does as I am sure you do as well. I cannot do it alone. I need your help. Please, provide suggestions and input so we can get the conversation started.

I am forwarding this document to every person I have an email for but please forward this onto anyone you feel appropriate.

Sheriff Garrett Wiggins