



## **Baxter County Judge**

One East Seventh St. - Suite 303  
Courthouse Square  
Mountain Home, AR 72653

June 14, 2018

County Judge's Comments for Baxter County,

Let me begin by thanking those who participated in the Primary election process, and supported me for the first ever four year term as your County Judge. I am humbled and will work hard to deserve your support. The only down side to the election on May 22, was the turnout. We only had about 13% of registered voters turnout and that was with 2 weeks of early voting. Folks, we can do better then that and I encourage you to always take advantage of the privilege to vote for your elected officials at all levels and in every department.

I had stated in my previous update more news and/or history on the Solid Waste District, but I feel that there is a much more important subject I need to bring to your attention and the actions that are being taken by Arkansas, Baxter County and all Arkansas counties.

Attached to this web page, will also be a link to read a recent update from Mark Whitmore, Senior Legal Counsel for the Arkansas Association of Counties, that contains much more information and I refer and encourage you to read it along with my comments. It concerns a current and ongoing major problem not only in Baxter County, but all across this great United States. It will be titled: "*Baxter County and Arkansas in the news as leaders!*" Please take the time to read and if you have a group that would like to learn more, let my office know and we will be glad to speak to your group concerning this issue, what we are doing about it and where we see this may be going. That is my challenge as County Judge, to bring such things to your attention and be a mouth piece in my own feeble way to make us all more aware of what we are facing. So if you have a church group, school group or any community gathering that would like to hear more and ask questions on this topic, (and others), let us know and we can try to arrange a schedule to meet with you. This newsletter could be very lengthy to make an attempt to cover this subject, but I will try to keep it short and refer you to the link that hopefully will be on the same page of our website.

I will relate a personal story that happened to me as we began to address the Opioid epidemic just under two years ago. As many or all of you remember, I had a serious health issue that suddenly came upon me that resulted in a very serious quadruple bypass surgery. After such radical surgery and treatment of the human body, anyone that has had this experience can tell you that pain can be and will be a major factor during the recovery stage. When the body is radically attacked as does happen in this type of surgery, serious pain a major factor. As I slept that first night under heavy medication, I began to hallucinate about 2:30 in the morning. I was awakened by the alarm on that very nice expensive bed in ICU when my feet hit the floor. At that moment I had two major emotions that struck me. One I was concerned that I had not damaged any of the many wires and tubes attached to my body and two, that I was about to be overrun with nurses busting through the door. So after they did exactly that, and as I lay there wide awake and being settled back in, I reflected on two things. Number one, I would not make a good drug addict! And that's a good thing. Two, I thought of how many people, and way too many, rob, steal, badger and/or worse, to get the drugs to feel like I just did. And I think about that morning some 12 hours after surgery often to remind myself of what dangers these folks either willingly or unwittingly face or situations they put themselves in on purpose! In my case, I addressed it the first thing later that morning with the first doctor to come in and see me, and they handled it like the professionals they are and I never had another issue. Thank you BRMC and your staff.

I tell you that to know I understand the epidemic we are facing nationwide right now. Many steps are being taken to address this, and it is happening in Baxter County as well and has been with the leadership of the Sheriff's office since 2010. Read about that and other things as well in the attached article. But see this quote out of that letter from Mr. Whitmore:

**Dr. Nick Zaller**, director of the Office of Global Health and associate professor of Health and Behavior Health at the University of Arkansas Medical Sciences (UAMS) explains:

“We know that our prisons and jails disproportionately house individuals with significant behavioral health disorders. And we know that using incarceration as a means to an end with respect to ending drug use among our citizens won't work — we have decades of irrefutable proof of this.”

Thanks to you the Baxter County citizens, we are taxing ourselves a higher rate of sales tax to expand our jail to deal with mainly this problem. We will be opening the bids on this project on June 27 to begin that work. But that deals with the illegal issue of the Opioid epidemic, and is not the answer. I checked yesterday and we had at one time 125 inmates in a 104 bed facility. We are expanding to just about 150 capacity and hope that is enough space. But as the article refers to, we are looking as well for other solutions. And we can't get them quick enough to suit any of us. Another problem as it was brought to my attention last fall, Baxter County just in a recent year, had over 152 legal prescriptions for Opioid pain killers for every 100 residents. Folks that is your and my medicine cabinets. That is being addressed by doctors and distributors as pressure is being applied from state and county governments which now has begun to include federal authorities. We have a proper means to dispose of them and I encourage you to take advantage of it. These drugs are highly addictive and extremely difficult to stop taking once hooked. Addiction can and will happen in seven days or less.

What we are dealing with in our jail, is the illegal part of this epidemic. They commit all sorts of crimes because of this addiction. They are a danger to themselves and all of us around them. Jails and prisons are not the answers but it is all we have had to use but we are working hard at finding other solutions but public awareness and help is a primary ingredient to any solution. Because of the cost of prescription Opioids and the fact they are getting harder to acquire, those addicted have turned to other more affordable illegal drugs. Among which are heroin and fentanyl. And as we all should know by now, many of these are deadly and, even more addictive! These Opioids can and have ruined many a good person and hopefully we have turned the directions of the graph and such use will start a down turn. I implore all of us to be aware and help in this process. It will take all of us to put an end to this huge problem. You or somebody you know well, maybe even family members has been or will be affected by this problem. It breaks my heart to see such good people be controlled by these chemicals that will change a life, and do it way to quickly. Learn all you can and help us stem the tide of this epidemic that can be completely controlled by choices we all make. Rest assured as long as I am here, I will keep Baxter County in this fight and participate with any influence I might have because we have no choice but to win this battle. Call or visit if you need to and get in the fight for our community and County.

I will soon write again and maybe on a more pleasant subject, but if you have questions or something you would like for me to address in this format, send me an email, [judge@baxtercounty.org](mailto:judge@baxtercounty.org) and I will address it if I can. Thank you again for your support and all the efforts all of you do for us and your County.

Sincerely,

Mickey D Pendergrass  
Baxter County Judge  
(870) 425-2755