

President Abraham Lincoln once said, "...with malice toward none....with firmness in the right as God gives us to see right...let us finish the work we are in."

The year of 2011 has been full of challenges and struggles. From the very first day of this year, we, as a county, saw the difficulties that would arise and saw a breakdown in communication...process...and action.

However, this county...elected officials and department heads alike...agreed that we could and can change our course for right.

Amidst debate, argument, and conflict comes good things. Our founding fathers themselves fought and argued and even casted insults amidst founding our nation. Yet, they came together to unite a country...a new nation.

First...we saw a more transparent process develop. We included more input and more hearings to gather input from citizens. We listened to the good and the bad and took steps to improve how we operate our county budget.

Second...we begin instituting changes in the budget to make sure we followed statute. We worked diligently to get input from all office holders and department heads.

Third...we begin to track our budget on a monthly basis...watching closely where our money was going. When issues arose, they were dealt with in public meetings and when needed we held public hearings to gather more input.

It was NOT one person...but a cooperative effort. No one person can take credit for the positive steps we have made.

Have there been arguments and debates. Yes. We might be reminded that John Adams and Thomas Jefferson did not like each other very much, but they did cooperate.

Difficult actions, controlled spending, and strong arguments have brought us where we are today.

1. We have a balanced budget for 2012.
2. By controlling our spending we were able to address the fact that many positions we have in this county are not compensated at the appropriate level. Our county auditor and treasurer have often reminded us that we need to look at the position and ask ourselves what other counties do.
 1. The county salary commission made up of the elected officials voted to increase our sheriff salary to bring that position more in line with like positions in other counties and law enforcement positions.
 2. We were able to increase salaries to staff in the recorders office, clerks office, assessors office, health department, public administrators office, codes & planning, road & bridge, treasurers office, and collectors office (NOTE: the

- collector has a position retire and she used those dollars to spread increases to the remaining staff).
3. We also had state mandates raises that were placed before the county AND were required by the state to add dollars to our judiciary.
 1. Our county judiciary informed us of the state mandate to hire three interpreters for county court system.
 2. The state also passed raises to our prosecutors office and the judiciary.
 4. We borrowed 400,000 from 911 to help our sheriff's office provide meals to prisoners and address other issues. We held our spending enough to pay that back before the end of the year.
 5. We were able to use statute to help our county manage its dollars better by applying a 3% administrative fee to the appropriate departments who keep our county books and human resources.
 6. We were able to avoid an property tax increase and keep our levy at it's current rates.
 7. We were able to heed the call of our public administrator who has seen an increase in cases...and add a position to help that office better serve our citizens in need.
 8. We were able to used our LEJC reserve to help our sheriff address his aging vehicle fleet that will give us vehicles that are both sound and in good condition.

2012 presents challenges...

1. One of the biggest and most important challenges of 2012 is elections. Our budget adequately funds the clerks office to make sure that precious right is managed in good standing.
2. Another major challenge is our aging 60 year old communications system that is impacting every law enforcement office, fire department, and EMS in the county. The 911 Advisory Board, made up of city and county law enforcement and fire officials, will be recommending a plan for the county that will require voter approval.
3. We must work together to advance the broadband initiative. We will have a new engineer and new plan to advance the broadband project as we enter 2012.
4. We must continue to control our spending and focus on basic services to insure that we stay on the right track.

I want to say THANK YOU to everyone who assisted in helping Cass County move forward. We will continue to strive forward and improve.