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To: Fellow Community Members

I want to start by recognizing the amazing resilience of the people of Okanogan County and the continuing efforts of those of you who are doing everything you can to assist in preventing the spread of COVID-19. This joint approach has helped keep our confirmed COVID-19 numbers low. I know that many out there are struggling to cope with strained family and business resources and other issues that impact each of us differently.

I understand that the cause of this impact is primarily a medical issue, that is now and will for quite some time have severe impacts on our economy with some potential public safety consequences. Toward that end, I want to applaud the efforts of individuals and organizations who are working every day to keep our health and well-being, infrastructure, economy, and other services as viable and healthy as possible in these trying times.

I assure you there is much effort and concern going into keeping us all healthy!! I have been working with our Board of County Commissioners, City Mayors, Emergency Medical Services, Fire Chiefs, Emergency Management, Public Health, Police Chiefs, and many other local leaders. It is very challenging to balance making decisions to keep our public safe while not abandoning the rights of the people or ruining our local economy.

With this in mind, I have been in contact with the Governor's office explaining how Okanogan County does not fit into the same mold as urban areas and we are able to adjust our habits, as we all already have, and continue to control the spread of the virus while also being able to enjoy ourselves and continue to provide for our families. We already reside in an area that lends itself to social distancing efforts by our rural geography and lifestyle. I feel it is time to transition to strategies that fit the communities through local controls.

Over the past month or so, we have been asked to do many things to assist both the public in being safe, and with government entities responsible to provide rules, resources and guidance on how to best deal with this crisis situation. Several of the things we have done include an effort to educate people of the state's Stay Home/Stay Healthy directive. In all of our contacts, we have cited no persons or businesses in this effort due to the positive response from those we engaged.

In an attempt to remain impartial to both law makers and official opinions, we remain steadfast in that we will not infringe upon the rights of the people. I am actively engaged in and support a local effort to identify a plan to move ahead and to start getting people back to work as well as recreation. We must recognize that medical risk still remains and therefore our approach must be

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measured and thoughtful as to its broad reaching impacts. We cannot just return to how we operated and expect this virus to disappear on its own.

I support small business and construction as two key places to start this effort. I feel our small business owners recognize their importance to the community and can and will take active measures to disinfect surfaces, limit customers appropriately for spacing and other necessary precautions to keep their customers and staff safe.

I understand why some are asking how we move forward and how we live with this and not in fear of this. I am supportive of lifting some of the restrictions in order to get our small businesses back to work and our community out and able to cast a line into their favorite spot. Business owners have made the investment into our community and we need to show them support in allowing them to exercise their judgement on staffing, precautions, and social distancing efforts. I am confident our small business owners are capable of keeping their businesses clean as well as having measures in place to support social distancing and avoid crowding.

The current approach decides who are the haves and have nots in the economic world. Making a list as to who is essential has not set well with me from the start as each and every one of us is essential to providing for our families. Currently, a single proprietor can mow lawns, but a single proprietor is not allowed to perform residential construction. This type of thinking is focused on the task rather than on how the task might be completed safely and avoid virus transfer from person to person. In both cases we have a single person working alone to provide for their family and provide a needed service to our community.

To accomplish this, we must all continue the efforts of fighting the virus. We will also need to continually monitor changes and be ready to adjust how we combat the virus should the conditions worsen. If we abandon all the efforts made so far or we could end up in a far worse situation than we have currently.

Sincerely,



Anthony D. Hawley
Sheriff