

# Self defense, underage drinking key topics at forum in Taos

By RYAN SMITH  
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TAOS — The second of several question-and-answer forums scheduled in outlying Cole County with Prosecutor Bill Tackett landed Tuesday in Taos, where several dozen area residents asked questions ranging from underage drinking to background checks.

Resident Ralph Sommerer asked Tackett about self-defense because of what he described as the long time it takes for the Sheriff's Department or Highway Patrol to respond to emergencies in the county.

"Most of the time it takes 10 or 15 minutes for them to come out, and when you have someone breaking into your house, it's way too long," said Sommerer.

Tackett noted Sheriff Greg White asked the county commission Monday for extra money to hire several additional deputies in the patrol division, which would help decrease response time.

"There is a real need for increased deputies, period," Tackett said. "It's something that has to happen."

In addition to helping response time, more deputies would have the potential to help the county economically by reputation, according to Tackett.

"You want to be known and have a reputation as a good, safe community," he said.

The issue of underage drinking also was discussed at the forum.

One resident suggested that more penalties are needed for stores that sell liquor to minors.

Tackett responded that a sting done this year was very successful, leading to the suspension of several stores' liquor licenses. Efforts like the convenience store stings will help prevent underage drinking, even though it would not stop it, Tackett said.

"Can I stop underage drinking? No. But can I save some kids' lives? Yeah, and we're going to do it," said Tackett.

Tackett also gave some insight into the prosecutor's office itself and the difficulty of the job.

He noted that one of the hardest parts is separating facts from rumors.

"A case is based on facts. You don't throw it on a wall and see if sticks, you're dealing with people's lives," said Tackett.

Tuesday's forum at the Knights of Columbus was the second in a series of planned meetings. Tackett also plans to visit Centertown/St. Martins and the Russellville/Lohman area in the next couple of months.