

Candidate for Mecklenburg County Sheriff – Irwin Carmichael

INCUMBENT IRWIN H. CARMICHAEL is 53-years-old and a lifelong Democrat who retired from the Charlotte Fire Department in 2012 and was sworn in as Mecklenburg County's 44th Sheriff in 2014.

On 287(g):

Carmichael is in favor of continuing Mecklenburg County's continuing cooperation with Federal Immigration and Customs officials and sees the program as a staff safety tool. "The 287(g) program is an identification tool in the form of a database that identifies those that are foreign born," Carmichael says. Only arrestees are subject to the program.

ON PRISONER VIDEO VISITS:

Carmichael believes that inmate video visits are an improvement over the on-site visits that were conducted in windowed visitation booths with handsets. The video visits eliminate the long lines that occurred on the days on-site visits were scheduled and allows unlimited video visits that can be arranged around the family's schedule. The efficiencies that have resulted from the implementation of the video visits has allowed the Sheriff's Department to allow inmates to receive two free on-site visits per week

ON INMATE SAFETY:

Carmichael says the Sheriff must have a thorough knowledge of state safety requirements and policies which require an initial assessment at intake and a follow up health appraisal. Inmates with a history of mental illness or suicide risk are housed in units that allow for increased observation. Counseling and psychiatric treatment is available if needed.

ON JAIL STAFF SAFETY:

Carmichael has proposed a pay raise to improve staff recruitment and retention.

OTHER ISSUES:

Carmichael lists recruitment challenges, the timely processing of gun permits, inmate mental health and an increase in sex trafficking as issues facing the department.

1. **Name:** Irwin H. Carmichael
2. **Age:** 53
3. **Party Affiliation:** Democrat
4. **Political background or other civic engagement endeavors:** A life-long Democrat devoted to Mecklenburg County both in service as a deputy sheriff and as a retired Charlotte firefighter. I have spent the majority of my 32 years with the Mecklenburg County Sheriff's Office teaching and educating the community about personal safety and self-defense using my knowledge and expertise for martial arts along with my passion for teaching self-defense techniques. I am especially interested in arming women, children and seniors with techniques to protect themselves. In an attempt to further educate the public on crime prevention and self-defense I also wrote a book, *Women's*

Awareness Response, and have produced a child safety and abduction video, *Kid's Awareness Response*. In addition, I use my martial arts proficiency to teach defensive tactics and ground fighting at the Mecklenburg County Sheriff's Office Training Academy, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Academy, and other law enforcement agencies, including the North Carolina Justice Academy and the North Carolina Highway Patrol Training Center.

5. **What are your qualifications for this office?** As a 32-year member of the agency, I believe I have the experience and leadership to lead this large and diverse agency. As the current Sheriff, I was challenged to find efficiencies in my budget year that required a full operational review of all areas and as a result, found efficiencies that resulted in budget savings of \$9.8 million dollars in two years. Someone that doesn't understand the complexities of operating a detention system of our size will be challenged to meet the daily demands of an organization with a \$120 million budget managing over 1,100 employees. There is a significant difference between a Sheriff's Office with its many mandated services (detention, civil process, sex offender enforcement and registration, purchase and concealed gun permits, court security, etc.) and a police department. I place significant value on the employees, whether sworn or civilian, each plays a vital role in delivering a high level of service to the community and through a number of partnership we are advancing education, training, and treatment, both mental health and substance abuse to our inmate population. As Sheriff, I have devoted a significant number of resources for training for staff on issues such as mental health and gang awareness and want to continue these efforts. I serve as a Board Member for Mental Health Americas of Central Carolinas and recently sought and received approval to begin a barber school in the jail to hopefully impact someone's life so they can earn a living wage.
6. **The Mecklenburg County Sheriff's office has cooperated with federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents (287(g)) for more than twelve years. Why or why not should that cooperation continue?** I will continue this program because my staff matter. For those that have never worked or spent any time in a detention facility, they don't understand the security measures required to keep both staff and inmates safe. I tell every new detention officer and their family when they graduate, my goal is to return them home safely at the end of every 12-hour shift. The 287(g) program is an identification tool in the form of a database that identifies those that are foreign born. I have repeatedly advised those that are engaged and willing to listen, the only way you will be subjected to this program is because you are arrested and brought to the Mecklenburg County Sheriff's Office. The top three charges for fiscal year 2017 were 1) DWI, 2) Assault on Female and 3) Indecent Liberties with a Child. The 287(g) program allows us to know who the arrestee is and their criminal history as well as possible gang affiliation. Regardless of anyone's position on the 287(g) program, I hope we can all agree that our detention staff should be protected and returned home safely at the end of their tour.
7. **What are the advantages and disadvantages of limiting inmate family visits to video visits? What is your stand on such visits?** Great question since I have seen firsthand the impact of the new process on our inmate population. Prior to the implementation of video visitation, the disadvantages far outweighed the advantages of on-site visits that were conducted in visitation booths through thick glass communicating via a handset. There was ONE (1) visit per week on a day dictated by

facility policy because of the intensive resources needed to move inmates throughout the facility. With the new system, long lines were eliminated by on-line scheduling that takes into consideration class schedules, convenience for family/friends and more than doubles the opportunity to visit. Since inception we have seen a 25% increase in visits. In addition to the TWO (2) on-site visits (have been and continue to be FREE) friends and families can now have unlimited internet visits for a charge. Internet visits allow for inmates to visit family that is out of town or visit with more family members at one time. The change has been extremely positive for the inmates and family members I speak to. I haven't received complaints from those that actually use the system and recently spent an entire afternoon talking with family members that were visiting and they were complimentary of the system and the increased access they have to their loved one.

8. **What can be done to reduce inmate deaths in county jails? What policies and safeguards are in place in Mecklenburg jails to ensure inmate health?** As a large detention facility, a complete understanding of State requirements for population management as well as comprehensive policies are vital to mitigating the possibility of an in-custody death. Knowledge of detention operations is imperative to the safe and secure operations and that is a primary reason I am the most qualified candidate for Sheriff. The Mecklenburg County Sheriff's Office is accredited by the American Correctional Association and the National Commission on Correctional Healthcare (NCCCHC) and follows their recommended standards for the prevention of suicides/deaths in local jails. Mecklenburg County is the only county in North Carolina currently that is accredited by the ACA and has been for fifteen years. Beginning with an initial assessment at intake and a follow up Health Appraisal within 14-days of intake. Detention staff receive training in First Aid/CPR and suicide prevention. The Medical Unit also has a Mental Health component to provide counseling and psychiatric treatment if needed and to assist detention staff. Inmates are placed in housing units with increased observation if there is a history of mental illness, suicide risk, or other medical condition as needed. A detailed administrative investigation is conducted upon any death, suicide, or attempted suicide within the detention facilities.
9. **Do you believe the Mecklenburg Sheriff's department has sufficient resources to ensure jail staff safety?** My goal has been to increase our recruitment and retention efforts since taking office in 2014. When I became Sheriff, I was committed to improving the work-life balance for staff and implemented permanent shifts after surveying staff. The results have been very positive with 92% of those responding to the Employee Climate Survey conducted by Mecklenburg County indicating satisfaction with permanent shifts. Overall the survey indicated an 85% overall satisfaction with the Sheriff's Office. In terms of sufficient resources, we manage to a Fire Plan that dictates the number of staff needed to ensure compliance. Although I would like to fill our current vacancies, as with any other law enforcement agency during this time, we utilize overtime to augment if required. I have submitted a reasonable pay plan adjustment that I hope will attract applicants interested in a career in law enforcement. A similar plan was submitted in last year's budget but was not approved. However, this year I have identified new revenue and other budget adjustments that will fully fund the pay plan adjustment.
10. **What other issues do you believe the County Sheriff should address?** Daily I address issues that are inherent to a Sheriff and his Office. A working knowledge of agency operations and being responsive are key to ensuring consistent and defensible

actions. I take the Oath of Office I took seriously and will not violate any law I am required to adhere to. My primary concern is working to find a solution to our recruiting challenges which are not unique to the Mecklenburg County Sheriff's Office and unfortunately our partner agencies, such as the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department, face the same challenge. I am committed to ensuring my Office addresses State mandates effectively and efficiently. One challenge continues to be the demand for purchase and concealed carry permits. Legislative action in 2015 presented many challenges for timely processing but working with the Clerk of Court and identifying funding from our budget, allowed us to partner and automate a system that essentially allows for almost instantaneous processing by the Clerk. Mental Health is and probably always will be an issue for detention facilities since jails have become the ultimate placement for those dealing with mental illness. This is one reason I was honored to be ask to serve on the Mental Health of Americas of Central Carolinas Board. I have been and will continue to be an advocate for those dealing with mental illness. Our Strategic Business Plan was primarily focused on mental health training for all staff. Additionally, I sought and received funding for additional clinicians to be dedicate to our youthful offenders. We have doubled our participation In Crisis Intervention Training (CIT) and recently had 91 of our staff take and pass a Correctional Behavioral Health certification. My goal is to continue to send staff to this week-long training.

Technology is ever changing and funding is difficult but I continue to find technology that not only aid staff but also inmates. We received grant funding last year for a new comprehensive sex offender system that allows staff to capture data that we can use to ensure compliance and aid in enforcement. One tool that will be implemented this year is tablet technology for inmates that will allow us to offer more access to library materials as well as education and vocational programming. Lastly, but not least is addressing the growing concern of sex trafficking. We are partnering with federal and state agencies to develop a strategic to deal with this atrocity.