



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on December 17, 2009

World's Toughest Sheriff — No Apologies

Arguably the “world’s toughest sheriff,” Maricopa County (Phoenix) Arizona Sheriff Joe Arpaio continues to draw heavy fire for his strong statements, stands, and tactics against illegal immigration.

After a long career in law and drug enforcement, [Arpaio](#) eventually advanced to the position of head of the Arizona DEA. In 1992, he campaigned successfully for the office of Maricopa County Sheriff, and was re-elected by double-digit margins for four additional four-year terms.

He instituted a number of innovative programs that have been effective in preventing or reducing crime, including bicycle registration; block watches; child ID; “Operation Identification”; “Operation Notification”; “Hard Knocks High,” which gives credits for a high school diploma; ALPHA, a highly successful anti-substance abuse “Project Lifeline”; and an annual summer camp for kids.

His office’s website (mcsso.org) hosts “Jail Cam,” an internet webcast which shows arrestees being brought in, handcuffed, fingerprinted, booked, and then taken to holding cells. The site receives millions of hits every day.

He has drawn national attention for three primary reasons: Tent City, Voluntary Chain Gangs, and Illegal Immigration enforcement.

Tent City is an extension of the Maricopa County Jail, which presently holds approximately 1,200 of the 10,000 prisoners incarcerated there. In summer, temperatures can reach well in excess of 100 degrees in the shade, making the upper bunks particularly uncomfortable for the inmates. When inmates complained, Arpaio said, “It’s 120 degrees in Iraq and the soldiers are living in tents, have to wear full body armor, and they didn’t commit any crimes, so shut your mouths.”

Because inmates stole the white prison boxer shorts, Arpaio ordered them to wear pink shorts instead. This was expanded to include pink handcuffs when the regular issue cuffs also began to disappear.

In addition, the inmates wear black-and-white prison stripes, are fed two meals a day (to save money), no longer have access to pornographic magazines such as *Playboy*, and their TV channels are limited to The Disney Channel and C-SPAN.

When asked about Tent City by *Nightline*, he [responded](#), “Why do you say rehabilitation? Why don’t [you] use the word punishment anymore? I’ll use it. You do something wrong, you lose your privileges, and you’re punished for it. So I’m not afraid to say punishment.”





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Arpaio [offers no apologies](#) about the inmate treatment, saying that he makes prisoners' jail time so painful that they never want to come back.

Volunteer Chain Gangs were instituted during Arcaio's first term as a way to provide essentially free services to save taxpayer monies by cleaning streets, painting over graffiti, and burying the indigent in the county cemetery.

In addition, Arpaio has expanded the county sheriff's posse to more than 3,000 volunteers who not only assist with regular police duties, but also by rounding up deadbeat parents, fighting prostitution, patrolling malls during holidays, and investigating animal cruelty complaints.

But the one area where Arpaio has been most successful, and for which he has drawn the most hostile fire, is illegal immigration.

When Arizona passed a state law in 2005 making smuggling illegal aliens across the border a felony, Arpaio instructed his deputies and posse to arrest illegal aliens.

His strategy was elegant simplicity itself: "We use minor misdemeanors to catch dope dealers, seize drugs, and catch DUIs," he said on [Nightline](#). Regarding illegal immigration, Arpaio told said: "That's a high interest of the country right now. And this county is putting resources towards that. I have \$1.6 million from the state just to do that."

Arpaio also noted on [Nightline](#): "We reward people for illegally coming into this country, reward them with jobs.... You do know if you go into the ER many people [are] here illegally where U.S. citizens have to wait in the back of the line and they get angry about this."

Sheriff Arpaio [told](#) the *Washington Times*: "My message is clear: if you come here and I catch you, you're going straight to jail.... I'm not going to turn these people over to federal authorities so they can have a free ride back to Mexico. I'll give them a free ride to my jail."

That's enough to draw the ire of such organizations as the ACLU, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), and [Amnesty International](#).

[Time magazine](#) recently asked if Arpaio was "an effective law-enforcement officer or...a flagrant human-rights violator." *Time* said that "although Arpaio's severe tactics are popular among Arizonans, his deputies have attracted widespread criticism in their pursuit of illegal immigrants for harassment and the racial profiling of Latinos."

The [New York Times Editorial Writers blog](#) considers Arpaio "armed and dangerous. He is a public menace with a long and well-documented trail of inmate abuses, unjustified arrests, racial profiling, brutal and inept policing and wasteful spending."

Even the [Goldwater Institute](#) has drawn a bead on Arpaio with its claim that the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office is not "the leader in establishing the standards for providing professional quality law enforcement."

Despite the attacks, however, Arpaio remains highly effective in upholding and enforcing the law, as the latest ABC [Nightline](#) show reveals. The [Nightline](#) team went along with one of Arpaio's deputies on Interstate 17, and pulled over a suspicious vehicle. The result: 18 illegal immigrants crammed into the vehicle.

[Nightline](#) concluded: "There's no time for sentiment. The night's bounty — 16 men and 2 women — were cuffed and placed in a prison truck. They made it to America, but their journey has come to an



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abrupt halt.”

Thanks to Joe Arpaio, the “world’s toughest sheriff.”

Photo of Sheriff Joe Arpaio: AP Images



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