



## OFFICE OF THE SHERIFF PUTNAM COUNTY, GEORGIA

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HOWARD R. SILLS, SHERIFF

January 14, 2013

Hon. Saxby Chambliss  
United States Senate  
416 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Chambliss,

I write you today at a point in my life where I have grave concerns about the future of our nation. Come this April, I will begin my 40<sup>th</sup> year in the field of public safety. I have been very fortunate in my career to have worked in almost every aspect of law enforcement, both in rural and urban areas, along with a stint in corporate security for one of the largest banks in the country. I have just been reelected to my fifth term of office, and I serve as the Director of my county's Emergency Management Agency. I am also the President of the Georgia Sheriffs' Association, but this letter is written from me individually as the Sheriff of Putnam County and in my capacity as American citizen.

The recent incident where children and staff were murdered by a deranged individual at the school in Newtown, Connecticut and the many similar incidents that have occurred in the past are horrific tragedies, and they most assuredly warrant measures and policies to prevent such acts in the future. While I may have never had personal experience with an incident of mass murder, I have unfortunately responded to and investigated untold numbers of assaults and murders during my long career. All of those incidents were also tragic and often senseless, but I know that firearms were not the cause of these crimes.

Erroneously, the national media immediately focused on guns as the cause of the crimes at Sandy Hook. In addition, from much of what I have heard and read, it appears Congress seems to be going in that same direction. This is what precipitated my fears for the country. In my county, and in every community where I have served as a police officer, I have found the most patriotic responsible citizens are those who own firearms. These people are the first to stand at attention and pledge allegiance to our flag, the first to bow their heads in prayer, the first to pay their taxes, and the first in line to vote on Election Day. They know the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment of our Constitution, and they know that their right to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed upon.

Senator Saxby Chambliss

January 14, 2013

Page 2

I expect my citizens to defend themselves from harm until we arrive on the scene, and I have a sense of comfort in knowing the vast majority of them are well armed and have the ability to protect themselves. I also find great solace in the fact that they have the ability to come to the aid of me and my deputies should some circumstance warrant it.

It is very clear to me that the public has little faith in most of its elected officials at the present time. Polls related to confidence in Congress glaringly reflect this, and I believe the same attitude trickles down even to the local level. Should Congress enact laws that ban, or even require the registration of firearms, it WILL NOT keep guns out the hands of criminals. The end result of such legislation will make criminals out of our best citizens, as I am absolutely certain that the vast majority of Georgians WILL NOT surrender any of their firearms, magazines, or ammunition, nor will they comply with any law that mandates they register their weapons with any entity of government.

The functionality of our government is completely dependent upon the majority voluntarily abiding by the law. It is my greatest fear that legislation banning or requiring the registration of guns the public can now legally possess will force our best citizens to a precipice where they will turn their backs to the law. Beyond that point, there will only be a slippery slope where only more laws will be ignored and not complied with.

I find it absolutely incredulous that there seems to be little discussion about the real issues that are at the root of people who commit crimes with firearms. Although a general decline in morality coupled with an insatiable appetite for illicit drugs are contributing factors, I believe the primary causal components at the of most violent crimes are a combination of mental health issues and our failure to prosecute, punish, and keep recidivist criminals in confinement.

When it comes to mentally deranged people, the State of Georgia has simply abandoned its responsibility to protect them or the public they endanger. I can explain the mental health problem in three sentences. When I went away to college some forty years ago there were about 4 and a half million people living in Georgia and there were 17,000 people institutionalized at Central State Hospital in Milledgeville. Today there are 10 million people in Georgia and there is virtually no one confined in Central State. The sheriffs of Georgia have evolved into being the largest providers of mental health services in the state as a significant proportion of the inmates in our jails suffer from a myriad of mental problems. This shouldn't be our duty, and it is something we are not equipped nor funded for.

As for the failure to appropriately deal with recidivist criminals, I will offer you just a few recent examples. On December 17, 2012 a young Clayton County Police Officer named Sean Callahan was murdered in the line of duty as he responded to a domestic disturbance call. Tremaine Lebis, the hoodlum who murdered Officer Callahan, was out of prison on parole at the time of the crime. He, of course, had several weapons in his possession (including a so-called dreaded "Assault Rifle") and had been released

Senator Saxby Chambliss

January 14, 2013

Page 3

from prison early after being convicted of Aggravated Assault in Gwinnett County in 1992 where he brutally shot a man in the head with a handgun. He got 20 years to serve for that crime and escaped while in a prison in Baldwin County in 1995. He got three more years for the Escape charge in Baldwin and was paroled in May 2008. He was to remain under supervision of Parole until April 2016.

Lebis was arrested, yet again, in Henry County for Possession of a Firearm by a Convicted Felon and some other charge in April 2011. He pleaded guilty to Possession of a Firearm by a Convicted Felon and False Report of a Crime in November 2011. I don't know what kind of sentence he received for that conviction, but the Clayton News Daily said he was given credit for time served since May 26, 2011. Nonetheless, Lebis was released on parole yet again on May 21, 2012. His next appearance at the rodeo of crime resulted in the murder of Officer Callahan. If Lebis had not been released on parole in May 2008, Officer Callahan would still be alive. If Lebis had not been released on parole AGAIN in May 2012, Officer Callahan would still be alive. It was already a violation of both state and federal law for Lebis to possess any type of firearm long before he murdered Officer Callahan.

Seven days after the murder of Officer Callahan, an individual named William Spengler shot four firefighters, murdering two of them, in Webster, New York. It now appears he may have also murdered his sister and been responsible for burning seven houses in his neighborhood. He, too, was a convicted felon and had previously served a whopping 17 years in prison for beating his own grandmother to death with a hammer. Again, it was already a violation of both state and federal law for Spengler to possess any type of firearm when he shot and killed the firefighters.

Three days ago Atlanta Police Officer Reggie Robinson was shot in the face while he investigated a complaint regarding illicit drug dealing. The individual who shot him was 20 year old Frank Emmitt Nance. Nance had a pending case of Battery against him from an arrest in April 2012 and was also on probation after being convicted of Aggravated Assault, Terroristic Threats, and Possession of a Firearm by a Convicted Felon in Fulton County on January 10, 2012. Nance had been released from state prison on March 28, 2011 after completing an arduous 8 months of incarceration from a previous conviction for Burglary, Theft by Taking, and, of course, yet another count of Possession of a Firearm by a Convicted Felon. Yet again, it was already a violation of both state and federal law for Nance to possess any type of firearm when he shot Officer Robinson.

You might think that the three aforementioned examples are exceptions, but I must unfortunately tell you that similar cases are routine and prolific all over Georgia and throughout the nation. The media very rarely even makes mention of a criminal's previous arrest record. Last year our General Assembly rammed through legislation that they called "Criminal Justice Reform". In reality it was nothing more than a statutory degradation of morality, as its primary component did nothing more than change a litany of felony crimes, making them misdemeanors and shifting the burden of cost from the state government back to the counties.

Senator Saxby Chambliss

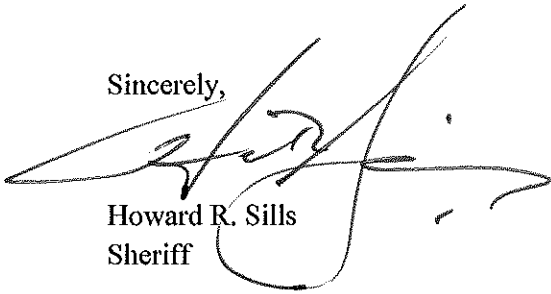
January 14, 2013

Page 4

Governor Deal touted that it was simply too expensive to keep criminals in prison because we were mad at them. I believe we should be nothing less than furious with recidivist criminals. The emotional and financial expenses that victims and others are left with in the wake of their incessant pernicious voyages far exceeds the cost of keeping the savages caged and away from society.

Senator, we have a plethora of laws already in existence that can effectively deal with the unlawful possession and use of firearms of any kind by criminals. I would support any legislation that mandated a sure, swift, and severe penalty for any criminal possession and use of a gun, but I will not support, aid, enforce, nor condone, any effort or legislation that will infringe upon the right of a law abiding citizen's right to bear firearms. You took the same oath as I did, and it was to support and defend our Constitution. I implore you to do so at this crucial point in time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Howard R. Sills", written over a printed name and title.

Howard R. Sills  
Sheriff

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