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Sheriff Ed Smith
MINERAL COUNTY SHERIFF OFFICE
P.O.Box 1450
Hawthorne, Nevada

Re: Armed Forces Day, 2010

Dear Sheriff Smith:

Last month marked the 60th anniversary of the Armed Forces Day celebration in Hawthorne, Nevada, and my first ever visit to Hawthorne to attend the three day party. I have, since then, spent a good deal of time reflecting on the experience. Hawthorne is to be commended for upholding such a proud, patriotic tradition. The residents, merchants and community leaders are obviously committed to honoring those who served our country in uniform. The tremendous effort put forth by the community in sponsoring the festivities and throwing their collective arms wide to make welcome our honored warriors is precisely why Hawthorne has earned the title, "America's Patriotic Home."

My friends and I, American Legion and American Legion Auxiliary members, decided some time ago to lend our support—both our time and our dollars—to Post 19 and its surrounding community of Hawthorne by participating fully in the celebration. We traveled hours to be there for Armed Forces weekend. While there we did pretty much what we always do when we get together. We felt pride in our country and each other, unashamedly displayed our patriotism, cried a little, laughed a lot, and looked for opportunities to make the world a better place by doing good deeds.

Any reasonable person would expect that, after 59 years of holding the Armed Forces Day celebration in Mineral County, its law enforcement personnel would be able to gracefully manage their sworn duties for the three-day celebration. It's not as if the event was an unexpected or new experience this year. It is an annual event in Hawthorne, anticipated and planned for well in advance, year after year, for 60 years. Yet, you somehow managed to screw it up. I hold you, as Mineral County's Sheriff, personally responsible for the deplorable outcome of Armed Forces weekend. Instead of joining the rest of your community in welcoming and honoring the out-of-town attendees you did exactly the opposite. You took unprecedented steps to stop the tourists from spending

our money and having a good time. The obvious and overwhelming effort to intimidate and discourage participation in the activities is directly traceable to you as the chief law enforcement person in Mineral County.

I believe that you, as a public official paid by taxpayer dollars, owe an explanation to the local merchants who lost money because of your actions. You also owe an apology to the people who came to honor veterans and support your community. Most of all, you owe an apology to veterans.

You might start by explaining why it was necessary to have a dozen heavily armed officers in attendance at completely innocuous fund raising events such as an arm wrestling contest, or lurking near vendor tents where tourists were selecting patriotic memorabilia. Or why officers were constantly writing down license plate numbers and taking photographs of perfectly behaved, law abiding participants in Hawthorne's Armed Forces Day celebration. Does Hawthorne or Mineral County even *have* a dozen officers to spare just for intimidation purposes? I understand that a couple of people were arrested for being drunk in public and that one man, a local, became abusive with his girlfriend or wife and officers stepped in to protect her. How did this minimal amount of officer-required circumstance at Hawthorne's biggest tourist event of the year justify all the extra law enforcement personnel you saw fit to have on hand? And why on earth were they so heavily armed? Had veterans and their loved ones ganged up to terrorize Mineral County in the past such that you deemed it necessary to be ready with a contingent of extra offices decked out in Hollywood style SWAT team gear? Personally, I think all the veterans in Hawthorne that weekend were themselves a great deterrent to anyone thinking about causing trouble.

While you are explaining you might also try to justify the expense for the completely unnecessary show of force. How much overtime pay did you authorize? Where did the extra officers come from? Is it true that you called out Nevada's Multi-Jurisdictional Gang Task Force to help you control all the well behaved, mostly middle-aged people who came to Hawthorne to express unified pride in their country and contribute their hard earned dollars to the local merchants? How big of an economic drain on the budgets of Hawthorne and Mineral County were all the extra uniformed bodies you summoned to mount your ill-conceived, bully tactic, wanna-be commando show? No disrespect to the offices intended. I'm sure they were all just doing what you ordered them to do. What will the far-reaching financial consequences be? Perhaps, unlike the rest of Nevada, your publicly-funded agency has surplus funds and Mineral County and Hawthorne are not struggling financially. However, I doubt it.

There were at least 400 motorcycles in Hawthorne that weekend. Keep in mind that those bikes got there because United States Veterans rode them to Hawthorne for the parade; *United States Veterans* —not criminals. We were not the so-called "one percent" of bikers who cause trouble. In fact, I only personally saw one of those kind of patches in Hawthorne. It was worn by a guy who answered from the crowd when I asked where the bathroom was. He held a door open for me and pointed the way. He and his wife were clowning around with each other and making people laugh. Whatever horrible

things one might imagine the one percenters doing, they certainly were not doing them during the Armed Forces Day celebration in Hawthorne this year. Moreover, they would have been badly outnumbered by all of us 99 percenters. Roughly one quarter of those bikes in your town were ridden by American Legion Riders, an organization I am proud to be a member of. If you consider how many motorcycles had two people on them, and how many additional persons came in four wheeled vehicles to support your town, then calculate how many dollars **were not** spent because you were successful in making us unwelcome and causing many to leave the downtown area early, then you just might begin to get a sense of what a colossal error in judgment you made.

Do you know anything at all about the American Legion and what a fine organization it is? Do you have the first clue about what the American Legion and the American Legion Auxiliary do? If you do, then you are doubly despicable for fearing and disrespecting their members.

I want to tell you a little about myself and the “motorcycle gang” I rode to Hawthorne and back with. Please pay close attention. I really want you to understand what kind of people we are.

I have never been in the military, but I carry a deep sense of debt for what my husband and others who did serve have sacrificed for my country and my way of life. (Which, by the way, is supposed to include the right to gather in crowds for any lawful purpose without being subjected to aggression and fear perpetrated by those in power. *See Bill of Rights, First Amendment*). I am a law abiding citizen who works hard. I am not tough physically, nor am I young. Sleeping in a tent was hard on me, but that was the only way I could afford to be there. I had no weapon on me the entire time I was in your county unless you feared my nail file. I posed no threat to you or to the citizens of Hawthorne.

As for my companions that weekend, I am not divulging their names here because: 1) I have not asked their permission; and 2) I wouldn't be surprised if a small minded person like you tried to retaliate once you read this letter. Given your ridiculous reaction to veterans assembling for a parade and fund raising activities, it is not a stretch to imagine you as petty and vindictive. I do not wish to be the reason for my friends ending up on the receiving end of any more of your overzealous style of law enforcement because of my personal expression of disgust at the way you handled your official duties.

Friend 1: She rides motorcycles and is committed to veterans' causes. She, like me, is a grandmother. She is a breast cancer survivor. We both jokingly tried to convince the fine young men in the recruiting tent to sign us up to serve our country but they politely declined due to our age. What a formidable pair we must have made!

Friend 2: A long-time volunteer at a Veterans hospital, she is a leader among women who support veterans causes. She is an animal lover and a devoted wife. She speaks four languages. I've never even seen her raise her voice! How intimidated you must have been by her. After all, she did ride into town on a motorcycle.

Friend 3: Retired after a long military career, he now spends most of his spare time helping veterans in need. He and his wife are the only reason a certain aging widow of a deceased veteran is not living on the street. They take care of her. He has a warm smile and a level of education I envy. The lengths to which he is willing to go to in order to raise money to help veterans are legendary. He is a biker.

Friend 4: Served in combat in Viet Nam and then many years in the Reserves. He has worked hard all his life. He survived cancer. He is a devoted husband and a caring and dependable friend. The most violent thing I have ever seen him to do is swear at someone who disrespected his wife but even then he controlled his temper. He gets all teary eyed every time a certain patriotic country western song is played. It chokes him up even when he is wearing his tough-guy motorcycle leathers.

Friend 5: You guessed it – another veteran who also rides a motorcycle. When his wife was deployed for over two years he was chief cook and bottle washer, maid, laundress, homework consultant, nurse, school play sponsor and all-around great parent for his kids. Oh, and he also did all this while he worked full time. He had no choice, and precious little help while he was a single parent because his wife was away serving her country. While in Hawthorne he had to schedule whatever dastardly criminal biker atrocities he may have committed (assuming, since I really didn't personally see him commit any atrocities) around taking care of his diabetes by eating carefully and taking his insulin.

Friend 6: He served in the Army. Now he works at a job where he is responsible for getting multi-million dollar projects completed. He not only made sure my husband and I didn't have to ride alone due to our late departure for Hawthorne, he also made sure that my husband had time to deal with dialysis along the way. He makes me laugh a lot and is thoughtful. He cooked dinner for us all one night. He likes Jimmy Buffet. He is also middle aged but a pretty big guy. I can see why you might have been afraid of him. He rides a big motorcycle.

Friend 7: Another vet. You can tell by his stance and the way he walks that he has suffered severe injuries. I'm sure he hurts most of the time but I've never heard him complain. Rides whenever he is able, has a quick smile and a ready sense of humor. Recently, the elderly widow of a World War II veteran was attending Memorial Day ceremonies where I happened to also be with my "motorcycle gang." The woman was curious about the motorcycles and shyly asked if she could have her picture taken sitting on one. This guy promptly offered to take her for a ride. She quickly agreed and had plenty of gentle help getting up onto the back seat of his bike. You should have seen the big smile on her face as they came back into the parking lot after a slow easy ride around the cemetery. I've sized him up as a good person to have as a friend and not someone I would want as an enemy. You could probably outrun him but I can see where, because he rides a bike and all, he might worry you enough to have called in the cavalry.

Friend 8: Yet another vet buddy of mine. He is a great big guy with a great big voice and a great big sense of humor. His days center mostly on doing things with and for veterans. Doesn't walk so well any more. Has lots of challenges health wise and finally

sold his motorcycle. He and I swapped off-color jokes and laughed a lot during our evenings in Hawthorne. Still, he hangs out with all those biker types and so may have caused you concern for the safety of the local citizens.

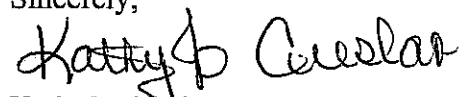
And lastly, let me tell you about my absolute favorite biker dude and my biggest hero, my husband. He was in the jungles and rice paddies and mountains of Southeast Asia a long time in the 1960s; has the bullet and shrapnel wounds to remember it by. He still suffers every once in a while from the after effects of malaria and from other none too pleasant life long consequences from his days in the military. He is usually the shortest guy in the crowd but tough as nails for an old fart. I've seen him look AND BE pretty darn menacing when circumstances warranted it. Still, he could do some real damage if you deserved a whooping and he was able to get hold of you. That would be the tricky part though - for him to get hold of you. Unless your asthma was as bad as his he probably couldn't catch you. Probably can't shoot well enough to hit much any more due to the tremor caused by some of his medicines. His Hell-raising ways were frustrated considerably that weekend by the never ending routine of having to regularly check his blood pressure and blood sugar, keep up with his insulin and other medicines, and do four dialysis exchanges each day. Still, he looks pretty intimidating in his old green beret, especially when he is on his Harley, so, I can see why you felt you needed several additional officers to keep him under control.

Back to seriousness. How can you possibly reconcile your over-the-top-aggressive, budget-and-resources-be-damned approach to this year's Armed Forces Day with the mandates of the office you hold? I'm pretty sure that you were not trained to do what you did by the Nevada Department of Public Safety, whose Mission Statement includes the language, ". . . with professional and ethical methodology." Nor were you guided by the stated mission, vision and philosophy of Nevada's Commission on Peace Officers' Standards and Training. See <http://post.state.nv.us/> Most importantly, how can you reconcile your actions with the patriotism long held and celebrated by the members of your community and their desire to overcome the current economic challenges by strengthening and developing their businesses? You cannot.

Sheriff Smith, you overstepped all boundaries of sensible law enforcement practices. You treated me and my friends with undeserved disdain, disrespected American veterans, cost the merchants of Hawthorne untold amounts of revenue by clearing us off your streets and out of your local businesses with your strong-armed tactics, and you spent taxpayer dollars to do it. Shame on you!

If hoards of veterans ever again invade Hawthorne to spend their time and money and commit random acts of patriotism and kindness, it will be because we have been assured that the likes of you are no longer in charge.

Sincerely,


KathyJo Cieslar

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