

Thanks for the Bombs, Boys!

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At a recent news conference, one intrepid reporter asked House Speaker Newt Gingrich if he felt that the extreme, anti-government rhetoric of the new Congress might be partly responsible for encouraging actions like the bombing of the Oklahoma City Federal Building. Gingrich, indignant, replied that it was a “grotesque and offensive” question. But, is it so far-fetched?

Since the new Congress took power in January, there has been a constant drumbeat of demonizing diatribes against federal employees and the regulations they enforce — particularly federal environmental rules. Federal agencies and their employees are castigated as unneeded, unwanted, and a drain on our society. Several bills passed by the House of Representatives, if enacted, will suspend environmental laws regulating grazing and timber cutting on federal lands. The recession bill recently passed by Congress made it illegal for Interior Department employees to even look for the Alabama Sturgeon, an endangered species. Representative Sonny Bono (R-CA) says we should “put all the endangered species in one locale and blow them up” as a solution to dealing with the Endangered Species Act.

Recently, the U.S. House of Representatives passed legislation granting extended powers to federal law enforcement agencies *except* the Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) — the federal agency responsible for addressing violent crimes and for enforcing the nation’s laws governing the use of firearms and explosives. ATF’s storming of the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas, two years ago has become a rallying point for militant, anti-government activists who see the federal government in general — and the ATF in particular — as being overly intrusive into the lives of American citizens. While ATF’s handling of the Waco incident is open to criticism, limiting its ongoing ability to address legitimate threats to public safety caters to the extreme, anti-government sentiments of the right-wing militia types associated with the Oklahoma City bombing.

The rhetoric of the right-wing, anti-regulation extremists in Congress is being matched in actions and words by the anti-regulation, anti-government wackos in the “wise-use” and county supremacy movements. One top Forest Service official recently told me he thought there was a >0% chance of a Forest Service employee being murdered this summer in either Idaho or Nevada. Forest Service and BLM supervisors have warned field employees to travel in unmarked vehicles, to travel in pairs, and always be in radio contact. They advise that if arrested by local officials enforcing (illegal and unconstitutional) county supremacy laws, do not resist: call the U.S. Attorney.

In a less publicized act of terror, a U.S. Forest Service office in Carson City, Nevada was recently bombed, allegedly by “wise use” extremists who resent the strong, pro-environment stand that the Toiyabe National Forest management team has taken with grazing permittees operating on the Toiyabe. A federal Bureau of Land Management (BLM) office in Reno, Nevada was bombed last year under similar circumstances. Thankfully, no lives were lost in either incident. In this emerging climate of fear and senseless violence, federal employees in federal and state land and resource management

agencies throughout the west have been shot at, sent death threats, harassed, and intimidated simply because they work for the government.

Incidents of intimidation and violence against government employees include:

- On die Toiyabe National Forest in Nye County, Nevada, County commissioner Dick Carver, in defiance of federal law enforcement officials, bulldozed through an archaeological site in a clumsy attempt to re-open a forest road
- On the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Bums, Oregon, government employees building a fence on government property to prevent cattle from trespassing on the refuge were obstructed from their task by the owner of the cattle who had repeatedly violated the terms of his special-use grazing permit whose permit had been revoked In response, wise-use activists declared: “We have no way to fight back other than to make them (the refuge managers and federal agents) pariahs in their community.”
- On the Gila National Forest in New Mexico, two Forest Service employees have been charged with criminal trespass under county law because they collected water samples from a mine on forest property. The mine operator, an active player in the County Supremacy movement, claims that the Forest Service employees subjected his property to “unreasonable search and seizure.”
- In Idaho, the State Director of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Martha Hahn, issued a terse “County Supremacy Movement Safety Guidance” memorandum. In language that was more reminiscent of an Army General than a top land manager, Ms. Hahn recommended the following “simple precautions” to her employees:
 - Before leaving for the field, notify your superior of your destination, route, and expected time of return.
 - Do not leave the BLM compound without radio communications capability.
 - Identify alternative routes in and out of specific sites and be aware of your surroundings at all times.
 - Avoid areas with a known potential for conflict.

In addition, this spring, two U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service law enforcement agents investigating the death of one of the gray wolves recently released into the mountains of Central Idaho attempted to serve a warrant on a local rancher as part of their investigation. Rather than assisting fellow law officers, the local sheriff came to the aid of the rancher on whom the warrant was being served, telling the agents to go back to Washington, D.C. Lacking a better option, the agents left without serving the warrant,

leaving the impression that intimidation is effective against federal law enforcement officers. Encouraging and justifying this intimidation, Representative Helen Chenoweth (R-ID) (who sponsored an “endangered salmon bake” fundraiser) responded by saying she will seek federal legislation requiring U.S. law enforcement agents to seek written permission from county sheriffs before taking action within local jurisdictions.

Extremist state legislatures across the West are passing laws that openly flaunt federal laws. Montana’s House passed a provision similar to that which Chenoweth espouses. Wyoming has passed legislation putting bounties on wolves (an endangered species, recently reintroduced) and creating legal defense funds to protect those who shoot them. Arizona, Utah and Idaho have created “Constitutional Defense Councils” to challenge unwanted federal laws and “mandates” and assert control over federal lands. Legislators in Wyoming and Montana have even urged citizens to buy firearms to keep federal officials at bay!

National right-wing talk show hosts have openly advocated violence against federal officials. G. Gordon Liddy, the infamous Watergate burglar turned talk show host repeatedly advises people to “shoot ATF (Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms) agents in the head,” but only in “self defense” of course. Rush Limbaugh, standard bearer for the new Republican Congress and confidant of Speaker Gingrich, commented a few months ago about property rights and “environmental wackos”. He said the “second violent American revolution is just about -1 got my fingers about a quarter of an inch apart — is just about that far away. Because these people are sick and tired of a bunch of bureaucrats in Washington driving into town and telling them what they can and can’t do with their land...”

Even the President is not insulated from this rhetoric. Last year Senator Jesse Helms (R-NC) publicly stated that if President Clinton visited a military base in North Carolina, he better have a body guard. Despite Gingrich’s disclaimers, it is not difficult to understand how militant wise use and property rights extremists might find encouragement and justification for violence in the inflammatory, anti-government rhetoric coming from supposedly responsible state and national elected representatives.

What You Can Do

Now is the time, as President Clinton recently said, to stand up to this kind of “reckless speech” that spreads hate and leaves the impression that violence is acceptable. Write your Senators, Representatives and President Clinton. Tell them that encouraging lawlessness and violence is not acceptable. Express your outrage at the intimidation of federal officials and demand that the Justice Department take strong and forceful action against the tenor being perpetrated by “wise use” and county supremacists who bomb our buildings, flout our laws, degrade our public lands, and threaten dedicated public service employees. Ask your friends, neighbors and colleagues to do the same

and emphasize that politicians who perpetuate violent rhetoric will be voted out of office in the next election.

[This article was reprinted with permission from Jeff DeBonis. Mr DeBonis is the founder of the Association of Forest Service Employees for Environmental Ethics (AFSEEE) and is presently Executive Director of Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER). PEER headquarters can be contacted at 810 First Street, NE, Suite 680, Washington, DC 20002 or by telephone at 202-408-0041.]

And Now A Word From Our Sponsor...

The Mendocino Environmental Center (MEC) abhors the use of violence in any circumstance and is dedicated to pursuing non-violent solutions to our environmental, civil liberties and social justice problems.

We deplore the climate of hate mongering and violence that is being fanned and, at least tacitly sanctioned by, many right-wing talk show hosts and elected officials. People must be educated to understand that the threats to the environment *and* the eroding of our rights and freedoms are coming from the greedy, out of control multi-national corporations, not environmentalists *or* the government.

We staunchly defend the rights of our public employees to do their job without fear of intimidation, harrassment or violence, just as we defend the rights of environmental (and other) activists to challenge and attempt to change the status quo through whatever non-violent means they choose.

We will join with Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER) in calling on the Justice Department to take strong and forceful action against the terror being perpetrated by the corporate puppet masters of “wise use”, property rights, county supremacy and other right wing groups.

The Ted K Archive

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