

**Testimony of J. Richard Cohen
President, Southern Poverty Law Center
Before the
House Committees on Natural Resources and Homeland Security Forum
on Countering Extremism on America's Public Lands**

**Antigovernment Movement Represents Serious Threat of Domestic Terror
and Direct Threat to Lives of Federal Employees
June 15, 2016**

My name is Richard Cohen. I am an attorney and the president of the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), a civil rights organization founded in 1971. For more than three decades, we have been monitoring, issuing reports about, and training law enforcement officials on far-right extremist activity in the United States. I previously have testified before the House Committee on Homeland Security and have served on the Department of Homeland Security's Countering Violent Extremism Working Group. I am honored to appear before you today.

I'd like to make four important points.

First, the militants who took over the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Oregon this year are part of a broader, resurgent extremist movement with a long history of violence and domestic terrorism. This movement represents a threat to the lives of law enforcement officers across the country, particularly the federal agents who manage and police federal lands in the Western states.

Second, the movement was emboldened by the standoff at Cliven Bundy's ranch in Nevada in April 2014, by the significant media and political support Bundy received, and by the government's lack of a swift and strong response.

Third, elements within the movement have made concerted efforts to recruit law enforcement officers and have succeeded in garnering the support of scores of county sheriffs who are sympathetic to an extremist ideology that rejects the legitimacy of the federal government. This development threatens the rule of law.

Fourth, to counteract the lawlessness from the antigovernment extremist movement, we must call it what it is—terrorism—and take measures to curb it. I've included specific recommendations at the end of my remarks.

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Like the movement of the 1990s, the current wave has been accompanied by widespread violent attacks and numerous terrorism plots.

- „ Since 2008, antigovernment extremists have killed at least seven law enforcement officers, including two police officers murdered in 2010 during a traffic stop in West Memphis, Arkansas, and two sheriff deputies killed by sovereign citizens in Louisiana in 2012.
- „ In February 2015, DHS cit

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through Recapture Canyon, a protected Native American archeological site in Utah. In June 2014, two men pointed a handgun at a BLM worker in a marked federal vehicle while holding up a sign that said, "You need to die." In April 2015, armed militia members led by the Oath Keepers group showed up to prevent the BLM closure of the Sugar Pine Mine in Southwest Oregon. Four months later, the Oath Keepers converged on the White Hope Mine on public land in Montana in an attempt to block U.S. Forest Service

in his honor across the country.¹⁷ Days after the shooting, an article on the Oath Keepers website said, “We vow to continue on with LaVoy’s legacy; his sacrifice will not be in vain.”¹⁸

Radical Movement Has Support Among Scores, Possibly Hundreds, of Sheriffs and Other Law Enforcement Officers

During its current wave, the antigovernment extremist movement has made a concerted effort to recruit current and former law enforcement officers to its cause, with a measure of success—an irony given that extremists within this movement openly promote defiance of the law and have killed and wounded numerous officers. The primary groups involved in this outreach are the Oath Keepers and the Constitutional Sheriffs and Peace Officers Association.

The Oath Keepers, founded in 2009 by Yale law graduate and former paratrooper Stewart Rhodes, is a militaristic organization that claims to have more than 30,000 law enforcement officers, soldiers and military veterans as members. The group and its founder trade in the same

The second group seeking to recruit law enforcement is the Constitutional Sheriffs and Peace Officers Association (CSPOA), founded by Richard Mack, a former sheriff in Graham County, Arizona. Mack became a hero to the militia movement in the 1990s when he challenged the Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act and won a partial U.S. Supreme Court victory that weakened the gun-control law.²¹

The CSPOA promotes the idea that sheriffs have a duty to resist federal agents who attempt to enforce federal laws, including gun control laws, that the sheriffs believe are unconstitutional. The group calls itself the “last line of defense standing between the overreaching government and your Constitutionally guaranteed rights.” Mack has written on the CSPOA website that the group “will be the army to set our nation free.” He once said he prayed for the day when a sheriff would be the “first one to fire the next shot around the world and arrest a couple of IRS agents.”²²

Mack, also a board member of the Oath Keepers, claims the support of more than 400 of the nation’s 3,000-plus sheriffs and a total of 5,000 members, including police chiefs, peace officers and other citizens. While it is unknown how many sheriffs fully suunkno.003 m]TJ 8.0113 0 Td ()Tj

Third, the federal government should devote sufficient resources to monitor and address the continuing threat of non-Islamic, homegrown terrorism. After 9/11, this threat was largely