



TESTIMONY OF
CHIEF DEPUTY RYAN RECTENWALD
SHERIFF'S OFFICE, GRANT COUNTY, WASHINGTON
BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
OF THE
UNITED STATES SENATE

MARCH 1, 2017

HEARING:
*The Effects of Border Insecurity and
Lax Immigration Enforcement on American Communities*

Chairman Johnson, Ranking Member McCaskill, thank you for the invitation to come and speak with you today. I'm here to talk about a horrific murder which took place in our rural community of Grant County, Washington. An incident that to this day remains the most dreadful scene I've ever encountered in my nearly 20-year law enforcement career.

We received a call around noon, three days before Christmas 2016. A woman was out walking her dog near the Columbia River in a picturesque recreational area which is popular with tourists and rock climbers and endeared by residents. She said she'd found a dead body.

What I saw when I arrived at the crime scene can only be described as straight out of a horror movie. The body was lying face down in the snow. Detectives found 13 bullet casings, 11 of those bullets found their mark, striking the victim in the back of the head, neck, and shoulder area.

A box from a case of beer had a message written in Spanish and secured to the victim's back by a kitchen knife. The victim was later identified as Jill Marie Sundberg, age 31, the mother of four young children. We later learned she was kidnapped by five men after an argument at a party. She was forced into a vehicle with those five men, driven ten miles to this remote area, and was executed. The fear and brutality this woman faced during that ten-mile drive, and in the moments prior to her death will forever haunt the case investigators.

During the investigation, we developed a list of persons-of-interest who lived in the same trailer park where Jill had occasionally lived. With the help of Immigrations and Customs Enforcement agents and the U.S. Marshals Service, we were able to pick up and interview three of the five men. While all five were later arrested on murder, kidnapping, and other charges, what's important to know is that all five were determined to be in this country illegally and one had two prior felony criminal convictions.

The fact that these suspects were here illegally isn't my point. It's that the shooter was still in the U.S. after being convicted of crimes, and previously deported. So, how did this happen?

It turns out the alleged shooter had been previously deported in May 2007 after his first felony conviction. He then illegally re-entered our county and in June 2013, he was arrested on new felony assault charges in Grant County. He served out his sentence and in January 2014 he was released to Immigration again. Prior to his deportation hearing, he posted \$8,000 cash bail in March 2014. He never returned for his hearing. **No failure to appear warrants were ever issued.** He was then later re-arrested in September 2015 in our county on a new domestic violence assault charge.

That's not how *legal* residents are treated when they miss court dates; you and I would have had warrants issued for our arrest.

Meanwhile, after the shooter returned to our community, local law enforcement had numerous opportunities to bring him back into custody during unrelated contacts, but due to the fact that no Federal warrants were ever issued, he was never arrested.

I was asked to provide insight on policies that Congress and the Administration should be considering to stem the unlawful movement of people, illegal drugs, and other contraband into the country. Can we start with just some basic principles?

It makes sense that after being convicted of a felony, you should not be allowed to bail out of your immigration hearing. If you abscond, WARRANTS SHOULD BE ISSUED and ICE and local law enforcement should be able to pick you up

Now, I realize that this may present administrative and budgetary concerns, but we need easier access to the bad guys. This isn't about illegal immigrants who reside in our communities peacefully alongside us.

Allowing us these tools would help us distinguish between the truly law abiding and those whose existence is to harm through violence or drug distribution via enabling policies and practices. This certainly is not justice.

Although I can empathize with the discussion about ripping families apart when it comes to immigration enforcement, I can assure you the Sundberg family has been ripped apart because of the lack of enforcement of current immigration laws.

Lastly, I would like to publicly commend the hard work our men and women put into this complex investigation. They live by an unwritten code that dictates they will never stop, they will never quit, and they will always work for the ones who can no longer speak for themselves. Their efforts have truly made our community a far safer place to live.

About...

Ryan Rectenwald
Chief Deputy of Special Operations
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Ryan Rectenwald has been a member of the Grant County Sheriff's Office since 2003. He has over 25 years of public safety experience.

After graduating from High School in Middleburg, Florida, he enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1988, serving as a Military Police Officer for over seven years.

Upon his honorable discharge, he joined the Grant County Sheriff's Office in 1996 as a Corrections Officer. In June 1997, Ryan was hired as a Police Officer by the Ephrata (Wash.) Police Department. In 2003, he returned to the Grant County Sheriff's Office.

Ryan's career has traveled in the path of investigations. He served as a narcotics detective for three years and major crimes detective for three years. In 2011, Ryan was appointed by Sheriff Tom Jones as the Chief Deputy of Special Operations, overseeing the Major Crimes Unit, Narcotics Unit, Marine Unit, and Off Road Vehicle Unit.