

### **Sandy Hook Tragedy Demands a Time for Reflection:**

The tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary has shaken the nation at a time when we traditionally come together as families and friends to share and reflect.

The country is heartsick over the loss of so many bright and promising young lives as well as the heroes who died trying to shield them from evil. As the people of Newtown, Connecticut grieve, Americans and Alabamians share in the pain of their sorrow.

This is rightfully a time of mourning and a time to be supportive of the families who lost their precious loved ones. Sadly, there is no way to legislatively end evil, and what that young man did was as evil as any crime could be.

While, in due time, there most definitely should be a national discussion over what – if anything – can be done to prevent such a massacre from occurring again, the conversation must be comprehensive, including mental health issues, school safety, the rampant violence in the entertainment industry and a whole host of other topics.

Nothing this important will be solved by a single, simple solution.

### **Benghazi Report:**

Last week, an independent review of the circumstances surrounding the September 11, 2012, attack on the U.S. counsel in Benghazi, Libya, was released to Congress. The report was ordered by Secretary of State Clinton who has so far either turned down official requests to testify or been unable to testify before Congress on events leading up to the deaths of U.S. Ambassador John Christopher Stevens and three other personnel in Benghazi.

The independent panel, led by retired Ambassador Thomas Pickering and former Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Mike Mullen, was blunt in its assessment of the State Department's negligence in providing adequate security for the counsel facilities in Benghazi. "Board members found a pervasive realization among personnel who served in Benghazi that the Special Mission was not a high priority for Washington when it came to security-related requests, especially those related to staffing."

The report refers to the attackers on the U.S. consulate as "terrorists" and notes that "there were no protests prior to the attack, which were unanticipated in their scale and intensity." This finding counters initial Obama administration claims that the attack was spawned by crowds angry over an internet video.

The report adds, "Overall the number of Bureau of Diplomatic Security (DS) security staff in Benghazi on the day of the attack and in the months and weeks leading up to it was inadequate despite repeated requests from both Special Mission Benghazi and the Embassy in Tripoli for additional staffing."

The independent report's findings largely confirm the suspicions of many Americans that the Obama State Department failed in providing adequate security for our ambassador and personnel in Benghazi. It also confirms the attackers were terrorists and there were no significant protests before the attacks to suggest a spontaneous, non-terror-related attack. Most importantly, it appears the deaths of our personnel might have been avoidable had State Department officials in Washington heeded calls from Ambassador Stevens for more security.

Four State Department officials have since resigned after the release of the damaging report, including the Department's head of Diplomatic Security. This is a good start, but the report does not end Congress's review of the tragic incident. Congress also has a responsibility to conduct its own oversight of the matter and will continue to do so.

Hearings continue in the House and Senate on the Benghazi attack and Secretary of State Clinton has been called to testify. Americans deserve to know not only the full facts of what happened on September 11, 2012 in Benghazi, but also the decisions of our top government officials before, during and after the deadly attack.

**Fiscal Cliff Update:**

As you already know, talks between President Obama and House Speaker John Boehner bogged down right before Christmas as the country nears the "fiscal cliff" on January 1, 2013.

Given the fact the House had, earlier this year, already passed legislation to stop all of the January 1st tax rates from going up, as well as a bill to replace the sequester with responsible spending cuts – two measures that Senator Reid has never even brought up for a vote in the Senate, it is now time for President Obama and the Senate Democrats to offer their plan.

There will still be time, before the end of the year, to take some action on a reasonable resolution. Unfortunately, the ball is in their court.

My staff and I work for you. If I can ever be of service, please do not hesitate to call my office toll free at 1-800-288-8721.

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