



Obama's Gun-control Hypocrisy Called Out by Alabama Senator

On March 30, President Obama commuted the prison sentences of 62 criminals, 12 of whom were behind bars for gun-related drug crimes. This was just too much for Alabama's senior Senator Richard Shelby (R), so the next day Shelby sent a stinging letter to Attorney General Loretta Lynch. He asked her about the president's hypocrisy and demanded answers to questions that he posed to her during a committee hearing back in January. Wrote Shelby:



I have strong concerns that 12 of these 61 individuals were convicted of one, if not more, firearm-related offenses ... [including]:

Seven convictions of possession of a firearm in furtherance of a drug trafficking crime;

Four convictions of possession of a firearm by a felon; and

Two convictions of use of a firearm in furtherance of a drug trafficking offense.

In commuting those sentences, the president said, "They're Americans who'd been serving time on the kind of outdated sentences that are clogging up our jails and burning through our tax dollars." Ignoring that blatant hypocrisy expressed by the president about his faux concern over wasting taxpayers' money, Shelby pointed out that Obama ignored and overrode his own administration's guidelines in granting those commutations.

The Office of Pardon Attorney (OPA) assists the Department of Justice in determining just which convicts deserve to have their sentences reduced. In August 2014, the OPA said the criteria included non-violent criminals who would not pose a threat to public safety if they were released; low-level offenders with no significant ties to large-scale criminal organizations, gangs, or drug cartels; those without a "significant" past criminal history; and those who had no history of violence prior to the crime that sent them up.

In his letter to Attorney General Lynch, Shelby said, "I am left wondering why the President and the Justice Department [would] consider individuals who carry guns to drug deals as 'non-violent,'" and that he was at a loss to explain just "how these sentence commutations are making our communities safer."

Shelby then went after Lynch directly:

When you testified at my hearing on January 20, 2016 regarding the President's executive actions, I brought up prior commutations that involved releasing individuals with firearm convictions. I asked you if you felt that the President is sending a mixed message to Americans when he issues new executive actions in an attempt to change gun regulations [on] one day and the pardons criminals with gun-related convictions the next.

I also asked you how the President can say he is "committed to using every tool at the



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Administrations' disposal to reduce gun violence" when his own Administration is not even following through with the sentences of criminals with firearm-related convictions.

At the time, you said that you were not aware of these particular sentence commutations ... but that you would look into these cases. We have yet to hear back from you or the Department about these ... questions ... which were due at the end of February.

During his administration, the president has so far commuted the sentences of 248 individuals, 33 of whom were convicted of firearms-related offenses, more than all of those commuted by the last six presidents. Shelby was particularly concerned about two who will be returning to Alabama in July: Ian Gavin and Jerome Harris. Gavin was sentenced to 15 years behind bars in 2007, plus another eight years of supervised release for possessing both a firearm and drugs with intent to distribute. Obama ended his incarceration altogether, effective in July, and shortened the supervised release to four years.

Harris' crime was similar: possession of cocaine with intent to distribute while carrying a firearm. For that he got 25 years behind bars in 2006 to be followed by 10 years' supervised release. Harris will also be set free in July.

Exclaimed Shelby: "Communities in my state ... are working hard to clean up their streets and make their communities safer ... yet, this announcement from the President sends an unfortunate and resounding message to criminals everywhere: if you are convicted of a crime involving a gun, the federal government will go easy on you."

After he posted a copy of his letter to Lynch on his Senate website, Shelby added this:

The American people expect their leaders to do everything in our power to keep them safe. Unfortunately, President Obama has used his executive clemency initiative to reduce the sentences of a total of 33 individuals who were convicted of firearm-related offenses to date.

At the same time, this President has repeatedly attempted to infringe upon the American people's Second Amendment rights through executive fiat.

I am deeply concerned with the mixed messages being sent by this Administration's decision to let criminals with firearm-related convictions off easy while attempting to make it more difficult for law-abiding citizens to protect themselves. I believe that this Administration's decision completely contradicts efforts to achieve a critical goal: keeping our communities safe.

The National Rifle Association's Institute for Legislative Action (NRAILA) called Obama's actions "'a glaring contradiction' to his previous assertion that 'the United States of America is the one advanced nation on earth in which we do not have sufficient common sense gun laws' ... so you would think he'd be using every tool at his disposal to deal with the violent crime threat." The NRAILA added: "But rather than focus on violent criminals, Obama's most recent and highly-touted gun control offensive targeted hobbyists and collectors who make occasional gun sales, licensed dealers, and expanding the attack on veterans to include Social Security recipients."

The NRAILA tried to give Obama the benefit of the doubt, suggesting that the president was "dangerously misinformed" that those criminals whose sentences he was commuting were really no long a danger to society. But it also suggested a darker, more insidious and dangerous motive: "that the president really is allowing dangerous criminals back out on the streets of their communities."

If one listens to the president, one might conclude that he really intends to reduce violent crime in America. If one watches his actions, however, one could very well conclude that he is doing what he can



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to increase it.

Photo of Senator Richard Shelby (R-Ala.): AP Images

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