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TO: All Durango-Area Local Law Enforcement Officers (c/o Department Chiefs)

c/o Jim Spratlen, Durango Chief of Police
Sean Smith, La Plata County Sherriff
Arnold Trujillo, FLC Chief of Police
Joseph McIntyre, Bayfield Marshal (please copy also to Jim Harrington, retired Bayfield Marshal)
Kirk Phillips, Ignacio Chief of Police
Raymond Coriz, Southern Ute Tribal Chief of Police
Adrian Driscoll, Colorado State Patrol, Durango Troop Office Captain
FBI Special Agent In Charge, Durango Resident Agency (c/o Thomas Ravenelle, Denver Division Chief)

In Honor of Our Local Durango-Area Law Enforcement Officers

Dear Durango Local Area Law Enforcement Officers,

Honor and Respect: In addition to our community's special recognition with the recent *Law Enforcement Memorial Walk*, Tuesday May 17th, which was honoring fallen officers of our local police departments, held during *National Police Week*, May 15-12, 2016, I want to extend my own personal thoughts of appreciation and honor in this letter to all of our local police departments and officers this Memorial Day—a day of thought, reflection and memory. I especially wish to express my condolences to those officers who have fallen or been injured in the line of duty and their family members, whether recently or back in our history. Let the spirit of these words also extend to honorable police officers and departments at all levels across our country in appreciation of your service and sacrifice.

Military Veteran: I'm a 69-year old Vietnam Veteran (Captain, USAF 1968-1972, Navigator on C-141 and EC-47, 170 combat missions/630 combat flight hours, 2360 total flying hours). Having served in a war, I am not unfamiliar with the hazards one faces when serving their country (you can find my Memorial Day photo appreciation to fallen service members on my Facebook profile page "[Root Routledge](#)"; and also on my political page "[Root For Bernie](#)"). This Memorial Day, Americans honor military service members who have died while serving their country—but people usually think of it as an opportunity to honor and thank all military members "for their service". However from my perspective, not only are military service members and their families in my heart and mind on this day of memory and reflection; police officers and other first responders also face duty hazards and are often the "unsung heroes" of our local communities—community service members in uniform or carrying a badge who serve honorably to keep our community safe. So, I also write this letter in honor of my father's brother, my uncle Jack Routledge who passed away many years ago. Jack served in the Royal Canadian Air Force as a Lancaster bomber tail-gunner during World War II (awarded a DFC); who then went on to a successful career as a police officer from "Constable On Patrol" (COP) through the upper ranks of the RCMP, about whom I'll say a bit more below.

Durango Area Resident: As a Durango area resident and engaged community activist for 22 years (Bayfield for 14 and Durango for 8) I know our area to be peaceful overall, even when community members disagree! And I have met and gotten to know a few of our fine local officers over the years.

In Honor of Our Local Durango Area Law Enforcement Officers

One of them, Jim Harrington, retired former Bayfield Marshal who I understand is sadly quite ill now, was one of the finest officers I've known. I had said to him more than once, "Jim, you are such an excellent example of a community *peace* officer. Not only do you wear a gun and run a good police department that keeps us safe; you are engaged with your community and are well known and well liked among our Bayfield residents. You make it your business to be out and around interacting with our community members and local leaders, sharing a cup of coffee and just getting to know and keep in touch with as many of us you can. You're open and friendly, making it easy to talk with you about any concerns we might have, or anything really; and, I'm sure you are highly respected among your peers." When I married a young African black woman in 2001 in Ethiopia and brought her to America and to her new Colorado home of Bayfield, I took her around and introduced her to various members of our little community, including Jim. I wanted her to feel welcome, safe and included in our small western town that not only had virtually no black people, but an old history of Ku Klux Klan racism. Living in an all-white community was a brand new experience for her, since everyone in Ethiopia is black; although there is widespread ethnical racism amongst various black peoples there. Jim received her warmly and made her feel welcome, expressing interest in her country Ethiopia and her family. And he gave her his personal number and card and said if you ever need anything or any help whatsoever, especially if Root is out of town, please call me and we will be right there for you. She really liked Jim, and whenever they came across each other around town, Jim was gracious and warm. He made my young wife feel safe.

Yet, we are not without burglaries, robberies, and other offenses, including violent crimes of assault and murder; as sadly happened a few days ago with the senseless murder of a Fort Lewis student by some out-of-towners. And even our southwest Colorado communities had been threatened by three "home-grown terrorists" 20 years ago, when Cortez officer Dale Claxton was gunned down and killed after pulling the three armed gunmen over who then machine-gunned his police cruiser. You folks, our Durango-area police officers, do an important community job that is also dangerous; and you never know when you'll encounter hazardous situations. You deserve the utmost respect and appreciation for your service in the light of unexpected and present dangers you might face any day on duty.

Police Violence and Accountability: Unfortunately, our country and its communities of all sizes, most prominently in major cities, perhaps, but also throughout rural America, have been facing a crisis of police violence. And it is not new, as organizations like "Black Lives Matter" and others so poignantly point out with testimonials about what it's been like throughout their communities for years. I have a 21-year old mixed-race African American grandson in Durango, and two little black granddaughters in Denver; so I am emotionally close to these concerns. Sadly, these all too frequent news events of police brutality in our country reflect poorly on all "cops" and, even though it is rare or non-existent to experience this kind of behavior from our local Durango-area police, and I know there are so many good cops, I find myself in the privacy of my own home expressing outrage about "these fucking cops" whenever I see news of yet another case of a police officer literally executing someone on the street, or other expressions of seemingly unaccountable police violence and brutality. As you well know, it is so prevalent and across various communities that the "few bad apples" explanation does not hold water.

It really represents a crisis in police culture and departmental and community accountability of individual officers and entire departments, that can only be addressed by better community engagement and oversight, better police candidate recruiting and screening, police training, and police supervision. The basis of some of it is extremely poor judgment, some of it an overt lack of courage by the officer, some of it is manifest racism and hatred, and some of it immature cops who become intoxicated with a sense of

In Honor of Our Local Durango Area Law Enforcement Officers

authority and treat community citizens as if they are potential enemies. In fact, by militarizing police departments across the country it often appears to the citizens that the police are an occupying army.

I know that if I was a good decent police officer I would be very disturbed about how all of this reflects on my law enforcement profession, police in general, and in particular on the public perception of me as a cop. So, although I might “rant-and-rave” in private about “cops” in general after yet another police shooting of a black or Latino man, or brutality and physical abuse, even death of an apprehended person while in custody, it saddens me deeply about the impact it must have on good officers everywhere. In a recent conversation when I ran into him at an event at the college, Sheriff Sean Smith told me he shared my concern and was proactively bringing improved training and recruiting methods into his department, which I certainly appreciated. I’m sure other departments everywhere are looking at what they can do to proactively improve their culture and be more engaged with their communities. Good police know that they are as accountable to the law as anyone else, in uniform or out of uniform; and “circling the blue wagons” to protect a bad cop who has done wrong only makes a bad situation worse. It can’t go on.

Of course I’m not privy to internal police supervision and department dynamics, so I really don’t know if local departments are facing such difficulties or not; and if so, to what extent. But, to be honest with you folks, from our officers on the beat to supervisors to senior managers, when I see these outrages on the news, I simply can’t imagine that happening in our little community having lived here for over two decades. You just don’t see it. When I encounter an officer on the sidewalk or driving by while I’m walking, I smile and wave; and so do they. In my opinion, that reflects positively on the local leadership we are fortunate to have here in our community police departments; as well as the caliber of police officer personnel. Again, my respect to all of you as competent, caring and committed public servants.

Police Courage, Judgment and Calmness Under Duress: This perhaps gets at the core of much of what we are experiencing nationally. There’s overt manifestations of racism, police murder and brutality noted above, as we have been witnessing. But, as one examines the news closer it seems we are dealing with a “shoot first” mentality as well—the cop “feared for his life” defense, with acquittal after acquittal and no accountability for taking the lives of innocent people, suspect or not. It’s a phenomenon well beyond what we would expect from people who choose this profession, put on a uniform, and step out into an uncertain environment every day. I certainly don’t want lethally armed cops cruising neighborhoods or walking the streets who are in a state of “fearing for their lives” with “every citizen, especially black men, a suspect”. Find another profession; or refocus your energies and state of mind.

One Cop’s Career: Let me end with a bit of a tribute to my uncle and police officer Jack Routledge on this regard, and by sharing of a couple of police stories. After joining the Canadian Military at the age of 16 and serving in WW II from 1940 to 1945; Jack served in the Provincial and Canadian police forces from 1949 until he retired in 1984, and various law enforcement boards after that. He began his police service as one of 12 constables in a small B.C. Provincial Police Detachment with one corporal and one sergeant.

To give you a feeling for the kind of police duty he performed as a new police officer, Jack writes in his memoirs (2003), *Lancasters and Lanyards — Memoirs of Chief Superintendent Jack Denison Routledge (DFC), Royal Canadian Mounted Police (Retired)*:

“On the evening and night shifts, the two constables on duty were allowed only seven miles per shift in the police car. The rest of the shift was foot patrols, checking doors of the business premises and all the alleys. If we found a door unlocked, we were not permitted to leave the

In Honor of Our Local Durango Area Law Enforcement Officers

premises until we had phoned the owner and he personally attended and checked to see if all was well. Calling the owner out of bed to check his premises increased the probability that he locked his doors each evening from then on. This type of policing certainly gave our community of Vernon one of the lowest crime rates in B.C. communities at that time.

“The winter of 1949/50 was extremely severe, but our foot patrols were carried out regardless. The temperature on a large mounted thermometer was reading -40 degrees F at 3 a.m. and we would have to start the police car every half hour to prevent it from freezing...

“One evening while on shift with Stan, my partner constable, I noticed a car racing at high speeds up and down the avenue, into adjacent streets, running through stop signs and creating a menace to other traffic. We hopped into the police car parked on the street and gave chase, up the Goose Lake Road to what was at that time the city garbage dump. He suddenly stopped, jumped out and took a rifle from the back seat. We got out of the police car, Stan on one side and I on the other, with our revolvers drawn pointing at him, as he had the rifle aimed at me. I ordered him to drop the rifle, which he refused to do. I advised him that one of us would get him immediately if he fired. After several tense moments he lowered the barrel and I rushed him and took the rifle from his grasp. The rifle was loaded, the clip was full, a round was in the chamber and the safety was off... Later he was convicted of dangerous driving and two charges of pointing a firearm at peace officers and sentenced to nine years in the penitentiary. Both Stan and I thought we were very fortunate that this incident ended the way it did.”

And that is courage! Rather than just shooting, which might have got one of them killed as well, he talked and convinced the man to lower his rifle and then rushed him to take it from him. How many incidents do we hear of these days where even kids are killed because someone called 911 on suspicion, the cop (or multiple cops) got out of the car and just started shooting and killing? Later, it gets revealed in testimony, “the cop feared for his life”... while the kid was holding a BB gun? This culture of reactionary cowardice has got to stop, be it via police recruiting and screening or training and supervision about mature judgment.

Jack moved on to other B.C. detachments, with a lot of interesting experiences along the way. He made Sergeant, then after Superintendent over larger police units, Jack moved to the national level as an Inspector and became the Criminal Intelligence Liaison Officer from 1966-72. Jack writes: “The creation of these duties was brought about by the lack of cooperation between police forces throughout Canada and the U.S., a problem that was playing entirely into the hands of organized crime, who were definitely organized while the police were not.” That led to RCMP positions at the highest levels of criminal investigation. He was put in charge of all Criminal Intelligence Operations and became the head of Canada’s National Crime Intelligence Units, the umbrella operation for all organized crime investigation in Canada, similar to our FBI. He gave lectures on Canadian investigation techniques to the International Association of Chiefs of Police in Washington, D.C., and retired as RCMP Chief Superintendent.

With respect, appreciation and honor, from your local Durango resident,



Root Routledge

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