



**MARK S. NELSON**  
Sheriff

# Cowlitz County Sheriff's Office

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*Serving with Honor, Pride and Integrity*

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Undersheriff

CHARLIE ROSENZWEIG  
Chief Criminal Deputy

LISA UHLICH  
Chief Civil Deputy

ERNIE SCHNABLER  
Director, Emergency Management

January 23, 2013

Recently, I have received many requests asking my position on proposed changes to our nation's gun laws. While it is an emotional topic and one where there will always be disagreement, I feel it necessary to let you who elected me know where I stand.

The tragic events of late have caused us all to look again at the issue of violence in our communities. The helpless feeling that naturally comes with such painful incidents is hard to bear. We want to feel like we are doing something; to take back control. Many are convinced that passing even more gun laws is the solution, but the majority of gun owners, both in Cowlitz County and across our nation, respect our current laws and act safely and responsibly. Conversely, criminals commonly break these laws to commit crimes.

If I believed that limiting certain types of currently legal firearms or magazine capacity for all law-abiding gun owners would actually prevent criminals from hurting innocent people, I would support it. However, the problem is not the gun or number of bullets it holds. It is the person and the choices made.

I am honored to serve as your sheriff these past three years, continuing the law enforcement legacy of the Nelson family. The Office of Sheriff is the only law enforcement position in our nation that is elected by the people. My job, as laid out in the Revised Code of Washington, is to be "the chief executive officer and conservator of the peace of the county." Additionally, the Oath of Office, which I swore, binds me to "support the Constitution of the United States and Constitution and laws of the State of Washington; and that I will faithfully and impartially perform and discharge the duties of the office of Cowlitz County Sheriff according to law, to the best of my ability."

I say that to say this: I am sworn to uphold the law. I am sworn to support both our national and state constitutions, each of which currently grants the right of the people to keep and bear arms. I believe it is a fundamental right; guaranteed. I fully oppose those who would take away this right, as much as I would those who might try to take away our rights to free speech or due process. I believe in the right to protect one's self and family with a gun, should that need arise. I once heard the late Colonel Jeff Cooper say, "Few men in life will need a gun. Those who do, however, will need one very badly."

Boil it down to this: I am personally opposed to further restrictions on legally owned firearms, civilian disarmament, and to the long-term effort to remove personal firearms through the process of regulation, registration, and confiscation. I believe our country and Cowlitz County are safer because of our law-abiding, responsibly armed population.

I encourage discussion. I believe this country can do a better job of protecting our populace by giving the criminal justice system the necessary priority and funding to enforce our existing laws. We can and must give mental health providers the ability to share vital information with law enforcement on a routine basis, thereby reducing access for many like the Virginia Tech shooter who was able to purchase a firearm, but whom clearly should not. I believe we can examine the desensitizing effect of violence in the entertainment/video game industry. (Recommend: "Stop Teaching our Kids to Kill" by Lt. Col. David Grossman) I believe that we must make our schools and public facilities safer by utilizing our tax dollars to increase the law enforcement presence there and training school staff how to react to dangerous situations beyond a fire drill.

Like all of you, I have been greatly saddened by these horrible crimes criminals (many with mental illness) have committed against our children and other innocent people across our country. However, it does not spur me to favor further gun laws, but to favor prioritizing our tax dollars to vigorously prosecute existing gun laws and to protect our most treasured gift-our children.

Our government, local, state and federal, is elected by us; its purpose being to provide for the support, safety and welfare of its citizens. I encourage our citizen lawmakers and budget managers to provide the necessary funding to assure adequate law enforcement resources to accomplish the purpose of peace and safety on our streets, and throughout our community. That's where they must step up and do the right thing.

That is change I can get behind.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mark Nelson". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Sheriff Mark Nelson