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Jardine: Stanislaus County Sheriff's letter decries gun law push

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MODESTO --]

Adam Christianson said his constituents demanded to know where he stands on the Obama administration's agenda on gun control.

"I had no intention of (weighing in)," Stanislaus County's sheriff said. "I would have stayed on the sidelines. But I was bombarded. Even the California Sheriff's Association was bombarded — 'What's your position? What's your position? What's your position?'"

Now they know. So does — or will — Vice President Joe Biden, when a staffer reads the letter Christianson sent Wednesday. Biden unveiled nearly two dozen recommendations this week in a response to the massacres in Newtown, Conn., Aurora, Colo., and other places.

Christianson strongly told the feds he is against any new gun-control legislation, period. So much for staying on the sidelines.

Some bow-shot excerpts:

- "I refuse to take firearms from law abiding citizens and will not turn law abiding citizens into criminals by enforcing useless gun control legislation."
- "Instead of enacting more useless and unnecessary legislation restricting the rights and freedoms of law abiding citizens, our elected leaders should focus their efforts on the underlying problem. Addiction, mental illness and a complete erosion of traditional family values in our society are all contributing factors."

And perhaps most pointedly:

- "Even more despicable are those elected leaders who use these senseless acts of violence to promote their personal agenda by politicizing tragedy and exploiting the victims."

Uh ... isn't he an elected official, too, and can't his critics legitimately claim he's doing the same thing?

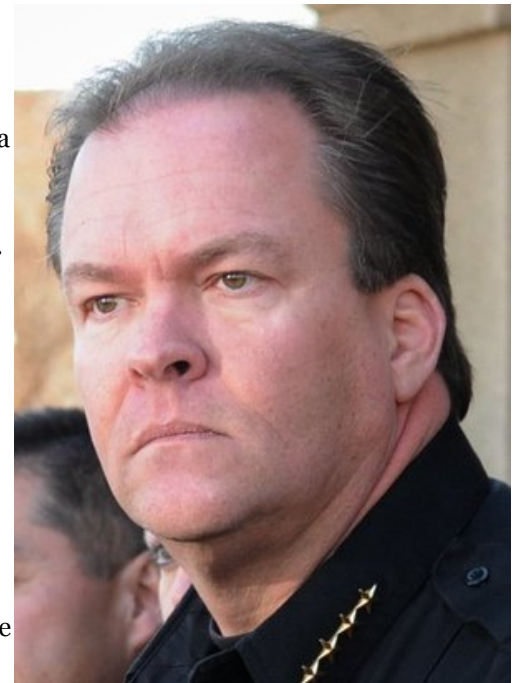
"I guess from that point of view, you make a valid point," Christianson told me Thursday afternoon. "I'm not trying to exploit children. I'm trying to provide an alternative. (But) you could certainly make that point."

Gun control always is polarizing and politically nuclear, and while he considers his views "more centrist than extremist," Christianson knows that any opinion at all is certain to infuriate someone.

Political? He emailed a copy of his letter to members of the pro-gun Madison Society, which circulated it online Thursday. During the 2010 campaign, after that organization accused Christianson of being stingy with permits for concealed weapons, Christianson signed a pledge that, in part, stated "self-protection shall always constitute good cause for the issuance of a permit to carry a concealed weapon."

Christianson's opponent, Rob Jackson, accused him of "flip-flopping" by changing his mind in the middle of the campaign. Christianson won re-election anyway, and over the next 2½ years approved 1,170 two-year permits.

So, yes, writing to the vice president is political. Christianson joins a sheriff in Oregon and others who wrote to say they will adamantly refuse to seize guns from law-abiding citizens, which is interesting because they are sworn to uphold the



(BART AH YOU/bahyou@modbee.com) - A San Luis and Delta Mendota Water Authority worker found a body matching the description of missing 4 year old Juliani Cardenas in the Delta Mendota Canal in Santa Nella, Tuesday morning. Sheriff Adam Christianson gathered with the media for a press conference in front of the Patterson City Hall, Tuesday afternoon. February 1, 2011 - Modesto Bee - Bart Ah You

laws, not make them. Christianson said he isn't in lockstep with the others.

"Unlike some of my colleagues outside of the state of California, I don't share the extremist views they do," he said.

In fact, he favors some of the administration's proposed changes.

"I really support (closing) the background-check loopholes and working with prosecutors to vigorously prosecute gun crimes," he said. He agrees that increasing health services for at-risk mental patients is a must. If the feds are willing to pay for what the state and counties cannot, fine.

"While we don't want to stigmatize the mental health issue, we don't have enough funding and resources to deal with mental illness," he said.

But banning assault and other types of weapons isn't the answer, Christianson said, citing the deaths of Stanislaus County deputy Bob Paris and locksmith Glendon Engert in April. They were shot while trying to evict a man who was mentally ill and heavily armed from a north Modesto home. Stricter gun-control laws wouldn't have stopped him, Christianson maintains.

"There isn't anybody who can explain this and understand it," he said. "They can never explain why Jim Ferrario did what he did."

The answer, Christianson said, "is not to get focused on weapons and firearms bans, but to focus on the underlying issues: addiction and mental illness."

And, of course, to brace for the impending counterattack by gun-control advocates now that he's bolted from the sidelines and jumped into the fray.

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