



Montana Human Rights Network
P.O. Box 1222
Helena, MT 59624
(406) 442-5506
E-mail: network@mhrn.org
Web: www.mhrn.org

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For more info: Travis McAdam, Executive Director, (406) 442-5506 ext. 11

Republican Central Committee Brings Militia “Sheriff” to Helena

Richard Mack, a former county sheriff in Arizona and a hero to the militia movement, is scheduled to appear at a Lewis and Clark County Republican Central Committee event on November 2 in Helena. Mack became a rising star in the militia movement during the 1990s when he sued the federal government over the Brady Bill, a gun control measure. He began speaking on the anti-government, or “patriot,” circuit in the early 1990s and never stopped.

“For over a decade, Richard Mack has been the darling of the anti-government crowd,” said Travis McAdam of the Montana Human Rights Network. “He’s made a career out of appearing at events with notorious tax protestors, hardcore militia activists, and a laundry list of dubious self-styled ‘patriots.’ It’s troubling that the local central committee views Mack as their ideological counterpart.”

In Arizona, Mack was elected Graham County Sheriff in 1992 with 57% of the vote. After filing his lawsuit, it was consolidated with a similar one by a sheriff in Montana, Ravalli County Sheriff Jay Printz. The US Supreme Court ruled 5-4 in favor of the sheriffs who said it was unconstitutional for Congress to compel local law enforcement to conduct background checks on potential gun buyers. However, Mack’s lawsuit and speaking time on the “patriot” circuit became central issues during his 1996 re-election bid, and he lost in the primary.¹

Mack has been touring the country and trying to get sheriffs to read his new book, *The County Sheriff: America’s Last Hope*, and to adopt his brand of county supremacy. He frequently promotes an organization called “Oath Keepers,” which promotes one-world government conspiracy theories and actively tries to recruit law enforcement and military officers to the “patriot” cause.² He came to Montana earlier this year on a multi-city speaking tour. In addition to the Helena event, Mack will be speaking in Hamilton on November 3. Notices for the Helena event downplay Mack’s views by claiming he is “an advocate for state’s rights” and only wants the federal government to follow the Constitution. The notices say Mack will talk about gun control, the oath of Office, and the supremacy of the county sheriff.³

Mack promotes the supremacy of the county sheriff, which follows the tradition of the white supremacist Posse Comitatus. The Posse viewed the sheriff as the highest legitimate law officer in the land. It

believed citizens were not subject to state or federal authorities. For the Posse, it was up to the sheriff to use force, if necessary, to prevent federal agencies from seizing property to pay taxes and to oppose any perceived encroachment by federal institutions.⁴

Mack's statements over the years reflect the Posse tradition. "The federal government doesn't have any jurisdiction to tell me what to do as sheriff," he told the press.⁵ While running for the US Senate in 2006 on the Libertarian Party ticket, Mack stated he would "do everything in my power to abolish the income tax and its 'Gestapo' police, the IRS."⁶ In a 2009 interview, Mack said he "prayed for the day that a sheriff in this country will arrest an IRS agent" for enforcing tax law.⁷ For some additional information on Mack, please see below.

"Mack's appearances in Montana are an example of the resurgence of the right wing that is currently happening in Montana and across the country," said McAdam. "Anti-government activists are trying to mobilize fear and resentment in our communities due to the current financial crisis and a new presidential administration. We have repeatedly seen extremists hide behind erroneous interpretations of the Constitution and issue shallow calls to patriotism. In the past, they've given us the Montana Freemen and the Oklahoma City bombing. It's troubling that a local central committee is helping a so-called 'patriot' dupe Montana communities again."

Richard Mack

- In 1995 following the Oklahoma City bombing, Mack said, "People get all upset when they hear about militias, but what's wrong with it? I wouldn't hesitate for a minute to call out my posse against the federal government if it gets out of hand."⁸ The Oklahoma City bombing was perpetrated by militia adherent Timothy McVeigh.
- In 2004, he edited a book by Randy Weaver. Weaver's standoff at Ruby Ridge, Idaho, was a seminal moment for the militia movement of the 1990s.⁹
- Earlier this year, Mack appeared on the radio show of "patriot" Alex Jones. Mack said, "There is one person who I believe can stop this New World Order. His name is your county sheriff... There is no question your sheriff has the responsibility to protect you from tyranny and international bankers...."¹⁰
- In 1996, Mack told the press, "What I support and what I see in most militias is the type of courage to stand for freedom as exemplified by the Chinese students in Tiananmen Square." This quote was in an article about the arrest of 12 members of the Arizona Viper Militia who were accused of plotting to blow up buildings. Most of the arrested members pleaded guilty to conspiring to make and possess illegal explosives.¹¹
- Mack has been called "one of the chief contact points between the NRA and the militias."¹²
- In 2003, Mack told a "patriot" publication, "I'm into freedom, so I hate the IRS."¹³

¹ Daniel Levitas, *The Terrorist Next Door* (2002), pp. 309-310; Associated Press, May 26, 1999.

² Oath Keepers, website, <http://oathkeepers.org/oath/>.

³ Richard Mack, website, <http://sheriffmack.com/index.php/speaking-engagements>; Montana Shooting Sports Association, e-mail, Oct. 22, 2009.

⁴ James Ridgeway, *Blood in the Face* (1991), pp. 109-141; Montana Human Rights Network and Coalition for Human Dignity, *Racist to the Roots: John Trochmann and the Militia of Montana*, 1995.

⁵ *Bismarck Tribune*, April 23, 1995.

⁶ Freedom's Phoenix, www.freedomsphoenix.com, March 22, 2006.

⁷ Oath Keeper Sheriff Richard Mack, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bLJgPuNAh60>, April 19, 2009.

⁸ Jack Anderson, *Inside the NRA* (1996), p. 84.

⁹ *Idaho Observer*, April 2004.

¹⁰ Alex Jones – Sheriff Richard Mack Pt 1, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O7IXhP20h6o>, Feb. 11, 2009.

¹¹ Knight-Ridder News Service, July 3, 1996; Anti-Defamation League, “News About the Militia Movement,” March 5, 1997.

¹² David Neiwert, *In God's Country* (1999), p. 332.

¹³ *Idaho Observer*, January 2003.