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ONE HUNDRED THIRTEENTH CONGRESS

# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

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### Opening Remarks

**Rep. Elijah E. Cummings, Ranking Member**  
**House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform**

### **Bipartisan Forum on "Victims and First Responders: The Critical Need for Gun Trafficking Legislation"**

**March 12, 2013**

I want to thank everyone for being here today for this bipartisan panel to hear from victims of gun crimes that resulted from "straw purchasing" and other gun trafficking incidents, as well as law enforcement officials charged with combating these crimes.

Our nation's first responders are often the first ones through the door at crime scenes. Far too often, these brave men and women find themselves on the wrong end of a gun barrel.

Today, we will hear from Ted Scardino, a firefighter from West Webster, New York who suffered multiple gunshot wounds when his unit was responding to a fire alarm on Christmas Eve three months ago. That fire turned out to be an ambush. It was set by William Spengler, a convicted felon who served 17 years in prison for killing his 92-year-old grandmother with a hammer. Despite his history of violence, Spengler convinced his neighbor to buy a 12-gauge shotgun and a Bushmaster rifle that he used to murder two firefighters and injure two others, including Mr. Scardino.

When you hear Ted's story, you will be amazed at his bravery, you will be disgusted by the depravity of the man who carried out these murders, and you will be shocked that anyone could have bought guns for this convicted madman.

Today, we will also hear from Joseph Lawrence, the Chief of Police of Plymouth Township, Pennsylvania, who will tell us about the recent loss of one of their own, Officer Brad Fox. Officer Fox was directing traffic when Andrew Thomas, a convicted felon, swerved into oncoming traffic. When Officer Fox gave chase, Thomas shot and killed him before turning the gun on himself.

Officer Fox was a former Marine and Iraq war veteran who left behind his pregnant wife and daughter. A straw purchaser bought seven handguns and two rifles for this killer, even though he was a convicted felon.

We will also hear from San Francisco Police Chief Greg Suhr. Chief Suhr will describe a gun trafficking ring that involved hundreds of firearms and extended from Georgia to California. Many of these firearms were recovered from crime scenes across the San Francisco Bay Area, including guns in the possession of an armed robbery suspect on parole, a convicted felon, and multiple drug traffickers.

I also want to extend a warm welcome to Philadelphia Police Commissioner Charles Ramsey. We know Commissioner Ramsey very well from his time here in the nation's capital. Today, he is here in his capacity as the President of the Major Cities Chiefs Association.

We also welcome David LaBahn, who is the President of the Association of Prosecuting Attorneys, which represents prosecutors across the country who face gun trafficking crimes every single day.

Before we hear from our panelists, I would like to recognize my colleague and friend, Congressman Scott Rigell. I was honored to join with him earlier this year in introducing the Gun Trafficking Prevention Act, along with Rep. Carolyn Maloney and Rep. Patrick Meehan. Our bill makes firearms trafficking a federal crime and imposes stiff penalties on straw purchasers who buy guns for convicted felons and others prohibited from purchasing firearms.

After working on gun trafficking legislation for several years, I have never been more hopeful that we can pass it with significant bipartisan support. Since introducing our bill, the number of cosponsors has continued to grow, adding both Republican and Democratic Members. And just last week, the Senate Judiciary Committee passed gun trafficking legislation—also with bipartisan support.

As someone who has been personally affected by gun violence, I am passionate about fighting to ensure that our law enforcement officers have the tools they need to prevent guns from getting into the hands of criminals. That is why we have been working so hard on a bipartisan basis to pursue this critical legislation to reduce gun violence across the country.

I now recognize Congressman Rigell.

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