

Resolution¹ on the aggressive sweep of Camp 210,² calling for police demilitarization

Whereas, we believe in justice, evenly applied, without discrimination. We support our local police, Sheriff's deputies, and mental health professionals in fulfilling public safety. We do not fault our police officers and Sheriff's deputies, who have followed their orders with discipline and professionalism, for the issues indicated below;

Whereas, no one in civil society is “the enemy,” nor should they ever be treated that way, short of armed insurrection;

Whereas, Sue Rahr, Executive Director of the WA State Criminal Justice Training Commission, wrote, “Why are we training police officers like soldiers? Although police officers wear uniforms and carry weapons, the similarity ends there. The missions and rules of engagement are completely different. The soldier’s mission is that of a warrior: to conquer. The rules of engagement are decided before the battle. The police officer’s mission is that of a guardian: to protect. The rules of engagement evolve as the incident unfolds. Soldiers must follow orders. Police officers must make independent decisions. Soldiers come into communities as an outside, occupying force. Guardians are members of the community, protecting from within.”³

Whereas, President Obama’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing affirmed that “Law enforcement culture should embrace a guardian—rather than a warrior—mindset to build trust and legitimacy both within agencies and with the public ... and should adopt practices to guide their interactions with rank-and-file officers and with the citizens they serve.”⁴

Whereas, the 2020 Whatcom Democrats Platform says “Use of excessive force is incompatible with democracy, human rights, and morality,” and says “Demilitarize police departments.”

Whereas, a 2020 Amnesty International report on U.S. policing states, “Equipping officers in a manner more appropriate for a battlefield may put them in the mindset that confrontation and conflict are inevitable rather than possible and may escalate tensions between protesters and police. Any police presence at demonstrations needs to be proportionate to the situation. *Police deployed in larger numbers than appears necessary or wearing protective clothing or riot gear where this is not necessary can be confrontational and intimidating. As seen in many countries, inappropriate or excessive police interventions can actually lead to violence and disorder rather than reducing tensions. ... law enforcement officers should demilitarize their approach and engage in dialogue with protest organizers. Such dialogue will reduce tensions and may prevent, de-escalate or end violent interactions between officers and protesters. Where a small group within a larger peaceful protest commit acts of violence and vandalism, communicating and working with protest organizers can help law enforcement identify those who are committing violent acts and targeting those individuals for those acts*”⁵;

Whereas, according to the conservative Charles Koch Institute, “Multiple studies have confirmed concerns about the militarization of police, showing that it results in law enforcement using [higher levels of force](#) against citizens. ... In recent years, law enforcement agencies across the country have increasingly adopted tactics, equipment, and a culture that is more akin to those seen in the branches of our military. This current trend has resulted in a clear decrease in legitimacy and trust between communities and law enforcement. When a community does not

trust those tasked with protecting their public safety, this negatively impacts law enforcement’s ability to achieve its goals”⁶;

Whereas, under our federal system policing is a local matter in the first instance, turning to the state next, and to the federal government only as a last resort, and with a request from the governor;

Whereas Border Patrol Police were present at the operation to clear the homeless encampment at Bellingham City Hall on Thursday, January 28, 2021. Several Border Patrol vehicles and over a dozen Border Patrol Police were photographed in the City Hall parking lot that morning;



Whereas, the U.S. Border Patrol is a federal agency and is not an appropriate collaborator for local public safety actions;

Whereas, the Washington State Patrol and Washington State National Guard are state-controlled entities, and thus appropriate backup for local law enforcement. Significantly, Washington State National Guard use requires application to, and approval by, the governor, placing an important check on local use of police powers;

Whereas, Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) teams were originally created to address active shooters, hostage-taking, and barricading, but an ACLU report found these uses now account for only 7% of deployments. The report stated, “When SWAT teams deploy, they typically wear combat helmets and “battle dress uniforms” (BDUs), fatigues designed for use by the U.S. Army ... Another piece of equipment that seems to be gaining popularity among SWAT teams is the armored personnel carrier (APC). APCs were created to transport infantry and provide protection from shrapnel and small arms fire on the battlefield. One version popular with law enforcement agencies is the Ballistic Engineered Armored Response Counter Attack (BearCat) APC ... The militarization of policing culture is also apparent in the training that tactical teams receive— SWAT team members are trained to think like soldiers”⁷;

Whereas, Bellingham uses a checklist with objective preconditions for SWAT deployment – presence of firearms or knives, a terrorist organization or gang, and seriousness of expected offenses – none of which were checked off in the official SWAT Threat Assessment. That assessment did not include even “probable” presence of firearms or explosives.

II. Weapon Assessment				
	Yes	No	Probable	Points
A. Is suspect known or believed to possess:				
1. Rifle - Semi-auto or bolt/lever action				
2. Rifle - full-auto*				
3. Shotgun				
4. Handgun				
5. Explosives*				
6. Knives on them				
7. Other: believe weapons cache in metal crate type: hatchet used in one incident			X	1
Total from "Weapon Assessment"				1
"Yes" = 2 points "No" = 0 points "Probable" = 1 Point				

In the checkboxes for an “organization which is known or suspected of violent criminal activity,” it stated “confirmed ANTIFA presence on 1/22,” **but conceded it could not even “probably” be classified as “paramilitary,” “terrorist”, “religious extremist”, or “gang.”** Last

September, FBI Director Christopher Wray told Congress the bureau views Antifa as “more of an ideology than an organization.”⁸ The Threat Assessment listed drug, alcohol, and behavioral health issues. That’s not what SWAT is for.

H. Is the suspect currently/historically associated with an organization which is known or suspected of violent criminal activity? <i>If yes, what group or organization?</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	2
<i>Can the organization be classified as:</i>	confirmed ANTIFA presence on 01-22				
1. Paramilitary	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
2. Terrorist	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
3. Religious Extremist	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
4. Gang	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

On the “offense assessment” for alleged “ANTIFA” actions on 1/22, it stated that no officers were injured, no “victims” were injured, no weapons were used, no violent felony occurred, and no nonviolent felony occurred.

II. Offense Assessment				Yes	No	Probable	Points
A. Is the offense a felony?	Crim Trespass 2d	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
<i>list the offense:</i>		2 BNC B.04 offenses					
B. Is the offense a violent felony?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
C. Was a weapon used in the commission of the offense?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
D. Were victims injured during the commission of the offense?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
E. Was/were an officer(s) injured during the commission of the offense?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Total from "Offense Assessment"							0
"Yes" = 2 points "No" = 0 points "Probable" = 1 Point							

“Trespass” was the only offense specifically listed. **In other words, SWAT was deployed without satisfying the high-risk conditions for which it was originally established.**

Whereas, protesters, homeless campers, and volunteers helping them pack up their belongings were confronted by **Bellingham SWAT police in military battle dress uniforms, a Sheriff’s SWAT military grade BearCat, and armed**



SWAT spotters in windows and on rooftops;





Whereas, the mayor said the extreme measures and the decision to move a day before the posted date were made necessary by social media calls for the involvement of “agitators” from across the Pacific Northwest.⁹ According to the *Bellingham Herald* all five persons arrested during the sweep were Whatcom residents, four from Bellingham.¹⁰

Whereas, following criticism of the January deployment from Whatcom Democrats and other local organizations, on March 15 the city successfully cleared the Geri Fields encampment with a minimal police presence and without incident: “Four police officers in regular duty uniforms kept watch as city workers gathered campers’ belongings for storage and removed trash and debris.”¹¹ This further suggests that the January 28 SWAT deployment was disproportionate to any actual danger, provocative, and damaging to community trust.

Whereas, some incidents warrant a more armored response by law enforcement, such as active shooter responses, hostage situations, or incidents involving explosives or hazardous materials. However, clearing the camp with a militarized police presence, according to observers, was very disturbing to many of those packing up belongings who have serious behavioral health conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Observers also reported that no organized group of behavioral health professionals were present to assist those vacating the camp. Such an overly militarized response was inappropriate and likely triggering to those residing at Camp 210.

Whereas, protesters have a duty to behave responsibly, and yet some Bellingham protesters harassed and assaulted the press and others spray painted threats on City Hall on January 28, and others reportedly interfered with service providers. We condemn threats such as “Kill Cops”;

Whereas, since 1994, the Whatcom County Sheriff’s Office has received about \$1.5 million in surplus military equipment such as an armored truck, two mine resistant vehicles, and various rifles, night vision, and thermal imaging equipment.¹²

Therefore, be it resolved that Whatcom Democrats:

- Requests Mayor Fleetwood conduct a nationwide search to hire a *genuinely reform-minded police chief* in sync with Bellingham’s progressive values.
- Asks Whatcom County Council, city councils, and the State Legislature to ban use of Border Patrol for local policing. In the rare instances in which local resources prove insufficient, recourse should be to the WA State Patrol and the WA National Guard.

- Urges the State Legislature and Bellingham City Council to pass legislation requiring that police and Sheriff’s deputies *always* wear identification with name and badge number, and should not be in BDUs.
- Calls on the Bellingham City Council and the State Legislature to adopt legislation that limits SWAT deployments to the kinds of scenarios for which these aggressive measures were originally intended – active shooters, hostage-taking, and barricading.
- Affirms the constitutional and moral right to assemble peaceably to protest actions of our leaders. It is an essential part of a free society, and must always be respected.
- Admonishes protesters to not interfere with the press or with homeless service providers. Moreover, violence or threats of violence are never appropriate. Individuals who transgress should be held to account.

Adopted at the April 24, 2021 General Membership (Central Committee) Meeting, 44-0-1

¹ This resolution is not intended to address homelessness, which we have addressed in a previous resolution, nor to contest the decision to clear City Hall Plaza. We are addressing the *manner* in which it was done.

² According to the *Bellingham Herald*, “Bellingham Police and Public Works crews with the assistance of other law enforcement agencies cleared the homeless Camp 210 encampment outside City Hall and the Bellingham Public Library Thursday, Jan. 28. The city told residents and advocates at the downtown tent encampment outside City Hall and the public library on Tuesday that they had until 4 p.m. Friday to remove their belongings. Members of the Bellingham Police Department and Whatcom County Sheriff’s Office were seen in body armor. Police and spotters were seen on the roof of the Whatcom County Courthouse and the second floor of City Hall, and the sheriff’s office’s armored vehicle was parked in front of the courthouse. Some U.S. Customs and Border Protection officers also arrived on scene. Shortly before 11 a.m., approximately 65-80 protesters and campers were packing belongings into vehicles. City Hall was spray painted with “You sweep we strike” and “Kill cops.” By 1:30 p.m., most of the tents on the City Hall and public library lawns were down, and a number of volunteers were helping people load their belongings onto trucks. Protesters also attempted to block and slap cell phones out of the hands of Herald staff members on scene attempting to document Thursday’s events.”

³ Sue Rahr, “Transforming the Culture of Policing from Warriors to Guardians in Washington State,” International Association of Directors of Law Enforcement Standards and Training Newsletter 25, no. 4 (2014): 3–4; see also Sue Rahr and Stephen K. Rice, “From Warriors to Guardians: Recommitting American Police Culture to Democratic Ideals,” *New Perspectives in Policing Bulletin* (Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice, 2015), NCJ 248654, <http://www.hks.harvard.edu/content/download/76023/1708385/version/1/file/WarriorstoGuardians.pdf>.

⁴ [President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing. 2015. Final Report of the President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing. Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services.](https://www.pdcp.gov/2015/05/21/president-task-force-on-21st-century-policing-final-report)

⁵ Amnesty International, USA: *The World is Watching: Mass Violations by U.S. Police of Black Lives Matter Protesters’ Rights*, 2020, 24, 28, <https://www.amnestyusa.org/worldiswatching/>.

⁶ Jeremiah Mosteller, Charles Koch Institute, “Militarization of Police,” <https://www.charleskochinstitute.org/issue-areas/criminal-justice-policing-reform/militarization-of-police/>.

⁷ ACLU, *War Comes Home: The Excessive Militarization of American Policing*, 2014, 6, 22, 31, <https://www.aclu.org/issues/criminal-law-reform/reforming-police/war-comes-home>.

⁸ Julia Ainsley, “FBI’s Wray says Antifa more an ideology than a group, undercutting statements by other Trump officials,” NBC News, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/congress/fbi-s-wray-says-antifa-more-ideology-group-undercutting-statements-n1240317>.

⁹ <https://cob.org/services/safety/emergencies/covid-19/city-county-addressing-tent-encampment-and-emergency-winter-shelter-needs>.

¹⁰ <https://www.bellinghamherald.com/news/local/crime/article249054425.html>.

¹¹ Robert Mittendorf, “Bellingham crews remove Geri Fields homeless encampment,” March 16, 2021, <https://www.bellinghamherald.com/news/local/article249963804.html>.

¹² <https://www.dla.mil/DispositionServices/Offers/Reutilization/LawEnforcement/PublicInformation/>

The Bellingham Police Department does not participate in the “1033” program which provides surplus military equipment to state and local law enforcement agencies. Also, this does not include military style equipment which

may be made available to state and local law enforcement agencies from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.