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President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Obama,

We greatly appreciate what you and your Administration have done on behalf of human rights around the world, pressing for the release of prisoners prosecuted and convicted simply for their political beliefs. We also applaud your actions in seeing that pardons are given to many non-violent criminals serving excessive sentences in federal prisons. But this makes it all the harder for us to understand why you allow former Governor Don Siegelman of Alabama to remain in a federal prison.

The fact that you and Governor Siegelman belong to the same political party is, of course, no reason to extend clemency to him. But neither is it reason to deny him clemency. No one with an ounce of objectivity would view a pardon for him as a bailout for a political ally. On the contrary, it would be seen as a belated act of justice to a man whom both Republicans and Democrats recognize as the victim of a political hit job.

Indeed, some of the most powerful statements on Governor Siegelman's behalf have come from Republicans, including a former Alabama Congressman, Parker Griffith, who called the prosecution and sentencing the "political assassination" of "one of the finest governors we've ever had in the South." George Will is no Democrat, but he too has denounced the injustice done to Governor Siegelman. The 113 present and former state Attorneys General who protested the conviction include many Republicans. This is not a question of partisan politics but of justice. Not only was Governor Siegelman wrongly prosecuted and convicted, he was tried before a judge, Mark Fuller, who had an old animus against the Governor for having instigated an investigation of his activities before he was named to the bench. It was a mark of the malice he felt toward the defendant that when the jury came in with its verdict, the judge had Governor Siegelman handcuffed and shackled in an evident effort to disgrace him. With regard to this, a former Republican Attorney General of Arizona observed, "That tells you that this was personal. You would not do that to a former governor." In prison, he has repeatedly been put in solitary confinement in an apparent effort to restrict his access to the outside world.

Fortunately for the state of justice in Alabama, Mark Fuller is no longer a judge, having had to resign after being arrested for bloodying his wife's face in an Atlanta hotel. An investigation later revealed that he had brutalized her at least eight times, repeatedly lied under oath, and made false statements to a judge of the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals. Nearly a century ago, the Socialist politician Eugene Debs was given a 10-year sentence for opposing the First World War. In 1921, when Warren Harding became President, he not only commuted Debs's sentence, over the objections of his hard-line Attorney General, he asked him to visit him at the White House on his way north from the Atlanta Penitentiary. Debs was shown into the Oval Office, where Harding greeted him with warmth and friendliness. Harding does not get much good press nowadays, but in that case he was fully living up to the Biblical teaching: "What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

It may well be that some prison time is appropriate in the case of Governor Siegelman, but if so, it is not he who deserves it but those who conspired to ruin his political and personal life.

He is now 70 years old. It would be not only a service to justice but an adornment to your own place in history if you gave him a full pardon without further delay, so that he can live out the rest of his life in freedom and honor.

Sincerely,
Peter Crane
Beatrice Crane