

Commissioner Questions July 9 2014 - Courthouse Security part II

Q. This morning I experienced, first hand, the new security policy which you've put in place at the courthouse. After being told to return to my vehicle and leave my small pocket knife, I gathered up my belongings and left. I refuse to be treated like a suspect.

A. I totally sympathize with you and feel your pain. I was one of the last commissioners in the state to succumb to this courthouse security inspection. If you read my Q & A last week, I told you I went along kicking and screaming. However there are lots of people involved with this decision to begin the security checkpoint besides just me. The Governor, the Legislature, the Judges, the Sheriff's office, NRA, Georgia Carry, the idiots who illegally use guns and shoot people, those who will not adequately fund the discovery and treatment of mental illness, often leaving them in local jails, those who think we should revert to a western culture of the 1800's when everyone should carry a gun on their hip and instead of using reason to settle disagreements, use gunfire instead. I could go on and on, but bottom line sir, I am very sorry and no one hates that it has come to this more than me.

Q. Has everyone been negative about the new security checkpoint at the courthouse?

A. No, in fact most have seemed to be ok with it, but that does not mean that those who are upset should not receive our ear as well, because they all have a valid point. How foolish was it for almost every courthouse in the State of Georgia to spend millions and millions of dollars on this new courthouse security back in 2005, because at the time there had only been one shooting in one courthouse in Fulton County in their history, and it came from a deputy's own gun and did not involve bringing weapons into a courthouse. However, on the other hand, we all have to admit that there have been lots of new mass shootings in the years since that shooting and we do seem to live in a country filled with more hatred.

Q. How safe is safe enough today?

A. Common sense seems to have taken a back seat lately. How safe is too safe and can we protect against all danger in any manner? I do not have the answer. What is an acceptable amount of danger? If we have a pistol, do we need a rifle for protection, or maybe a shotgun? If that is not adequate, do we need an assault rifle, and if that is not adequate do we need a machine gun? So do we then need a grenade launcher and why not allow us to drive around in military tanks that can blow holes in about anything? Where is the logical limit when so many want no limits and no licenses of any kind and worse of all, no training of any kind.

Q. Would not a sign prohibiting armed entrance into the courthouse-similar to the sign which was in place for many years, be sufficient and prevent the need for courthouse security?

A. I think so and again, I personally agree, at least in our part of the state. But with the new gun law, HB 60, without courthouse security checkpoints and scanners, we would

have no longer been able to have a sign stating that guns were prevented in the courthouse, because the new law would not have allowed the signs!

Another strange part of the new law - if one of the two deputies that we have had patrolling our courthouse for several years saw someone walk in with a gun on their hip, they would not have the right to ask them if they had a license to carry the gun. If that is not enough, the State of Georgia is now not allowed to keep a central data base of gun carry permit holders, only local counties can do it. So even if a deputy asked to see a license, which they could not by the new law, then there would be no way to verify the new license for authenticity. In other words, if someone has a counterfeit gun carry license, unless you are in the county where it was issued, you have no way to check it. Further, since you can not even ask to see it without cause, then no one will ever know it is counterfeit unless that person uses the gun inappropriately, and then it is too late.

Q. Is the new gun law, HB 60 really the real problem?

A. I will let you decide what kind of legislation it was. No city or county office building in the State of Georgia, including city hall or our offices, that does not have a manned security checkpoint with a scanner, not only can not put a sign up against bringing in guns, but can not prevent the carry of weapons into their buildings with a carry permit. And guess what else, no deputy or sheriff or police official is allowed to ask anyone if they have a legal carry permit for the weapon strapped on their hip, without cause. However, we have found a trick, although we will not be using it.

If we did not have a security check point with a scanner in our lower level where you enter to go to the Clerk of Courts office beginning July 2, the only way we could legally limit weapons carried into the building would be to establish a liquor bar at the bottom of the steps. If we were to open a public bar, properly licensed, then we could legally put up a sign stating that you could not bring weapons into the building, but because we are not a bar but just a government building, we can not erect a sign or limit guns unless we have security check points. You decide what someone was thinking in this bill?

Q. Are you one of those anti-gun rights commissioners?

A. I certainly am not. My father bought me a 20 gauge shotgun when I was 12 and I have hunted by myself and with others ever since. I have many guns and a carry permit and I know how to shoot. But this new gun law went way past gun rights. They took the rights away from all governments in the State of Georgia, yet left the churches and bars with the rights to make their own decisions. Many are constantly complaining because states rights are taken away from the states by the Federal government, yet they do not blink when they take rights away from local governments, apparently assuming we are incapable of making our own decisions.

Q. Are you happy with the new gun law?

A. Not no, but heck no !!!

Q. Who is to blame for the new gun carry law?

A. It is not for blaming people, but should be about fixing the problems for next year in the State Legislature. I know many did not know what they were signing the last night of the Legislative session, when the bill was passed back and forth between the House and Senate just before midnight, and I think there are still many that do not know what is in the new law or even how to interpret it. It was not a partisan bill. Heck, since I have been unable to get guidance on many parts of the bill, I could be misunderstanding parts of it. I hope you will try to log on line and read the new law and let me know what you think and how you understand it and what purpose it really serves to improve safety and improve legitimate and common sense gun carry rights. To view HB 60 go to the Georgia General Assembly website at www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/. You can contact me at unioncounty@uniongov.com, 65 Courthouse St, Blairsville, GA 30512, or call at 706-439-6000.