

James E. Thomas

04/05/2017

PSC reacts to campus carry

By James E. Thomas

How would it make you feel to know that the student next to you, or your professor might be carrying a gun? For some, the thought that a classmate or professor could be carrying a weapon is unsettling but for others, it's reassuring to know there is someone else there to protect them.

Earlier this year, Representative Scott Plakon introduced a bill that if passed will repeal the ban of concealed carrying firearms on Florida college and university campuses.

This is the third year in a row that a bill like this has been introduced, and if it passes, it is scheduled to go in to effect on July 1, 2017.

The bill has polarized students and staff at campuses around the state, and PSC campus is no exception to that rule.

Some don't support the bill for fear of public and personal safety, as well as the distractions and other problems that could be created by allowing campus carry.

"I don't support guns on campus," said Sean Minton.

"I think that it would be a distraction to the learning environment if students brought their "concealed" weapons to class. I know that if I were in a class, and I saw someone carrying a gun in their holster, it would make me uncomfortable because you don't know who that person is. They could snap at any moment,"

However, others have a different view of the subject, feeling that it could make college campuses a safer environment for both students and faculty.

“I do support the repeal because I feel it would benefit campuses in a way. I find it comforting knowing that there is someone sitting next to me in class with a gun and a license to carry knowing if anything were to happen I would be protected.” said Nahomi Sanchez.

Lt. Fagan, PSC police officer, said “I enforce the laws as they are on the books,”

“On the good side, of course you are going to have people that are there to help the officers if the need ever should arise,” This was the case during the Texas Tower Shooting in 1966 at the University of Texas in Austin.

“The bad side of it is if there is a shooting situation, when law enforcement goes in, we are going to see a person with a gun. We don’t know if that’s a good guy or a bad guy, and the other thing we don’t know is how proficient they are with the weapon,” said Fagan.

Minton also shared his concerns about what kind of effects allowing campus carry might have and voiced several valid points that many other students and faculty around the state share.

“I just think it is unnecessary for students and teachers to carry firearms on campus. You never know if their weapon can misfire during a class. If a student were to leave their weapon in their bag, someone could steal it and use it. When people get upset they don’t think, and I think that someone could easily just get upset by what a peer or a teacher says and do things they may regret,” said Minton.

Others though feel that the repeal would only make campuses safer.

“I believe people will be stricter about making sure anyone with a gun on campus is licensed as well as everyone being more educated in gun safety about what to do and what not to do,” said Sanchez.

“I believe it would make campuses much safer. If anything were to happen, I know that the teachers are prepared to handle any situation and do what they could to not only protect the students but themselves as well,”

Campus safety is definitely an issue when it comes to campus carry; and gun safety and proper licensing are big issues that will need to be covered if the repeal goes through.

One possible answer to this is to have gun safety and concealed carry courses taught on campus to students and faculty that are interested in them.

Lt. Fagan said,

“I would definitely support that. If you’re going to have people on your campus who are lawfully carrying weapons, they have a concealed weapons permit. Anytime you can get them out to the range and shoot, you can make them more proficient and more comfortable around their gun. Just like us [the police], we qualify twice a year. So, we’re shooting at least twice a year. So I can only see that as a positive thing,” said Fagan.

Sanchez said, “I even believe all colleges and universities should offer these classes regardless of the repeal or not. Gun safety is absolutely important. Many accidents happen because people don’t want to educate themselves on gun safety and there have been several different cases of people dying or nearly dying because of lack of gun education,”

Currently 18 states, including Florida, ban the carrying of concealed firearms on campus, while 24 states leave the decision up to the institution, and only eight states actually allow concealed carry on campus in some form or another, though in many cases even this is regulated and only four of those eight allow firearms campus wide.

With this in mind it does beg the questions of where firearms will be allowed at on campuses if the bill passes and how will this effect out-of-state students and their parents?

“I think they would be uncomfortable depending on who the students’ parents are. I would be worried for security on campus. Some of them are students should they have to carry a concealed weapon now if every other student gets to? Same with the officers on campus as well. I feel like if anyone is going to be mostly affected it would be them,” said Minton, sharing some of the same concerns that Lt. Fagan had.

Others have a more ambiguous view of the event, seeing only shades of gray.

“I’m sure they will feel like any parent would feel sending their children to school. Anything can happen. If a college that allows guns undergoes a shooting, is it the colleges fault for allowing students to have guns on campus? And if the same situation happens to a school that doesn’t allow guns on campus, are we going to blame the school for not allowing the kids to have something to protect themselves,” said Sanchez.

Lt. Fagan showed a more middle-of-the-road approach.

“Yeah, you’re going to have the parents that totally agree with it and some that absolutely go against it. And they may base their whole decision on whether or not their child should attend that school on if students are allowed to carry guns. They may persuade their child to go somewhere else. You’ll have some that like it, and some that don’t,” said Lt. Fagan.

Students' reactions can vary as much as their parents on whether or not they should attend a school that allows campus carry.

"Hell, I wouldn't go to school there! You can see me taking online classes then," said Minton.

Sanchez's view about student's carrying firearms was on the opposite end of the spectrum from Minton's.

"I believe they will be worried, but the way I see it, women get raped, people are being killed, the world is not perfect. A student should have the right to protect himself everywhere he goes." she said.

Ultimately that's what the entire bill is about, to what extent do students have the right to protect themselves while on campus, and what responsibility does the college or university have to ensuring the safety of the students while also still holding to the laws of the land?

These are hard questions with no easy answers, but perhaps students and faculty at PSC as well as college and university campuses around Florida may be compelled forced to answer them sooner rather than later.