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## YOUR SAY: Taking issue with Erickson's stance on labor unions

Macon City Councilman Erick Erickson advocates "shutting down the police department and contracting out the public safety obligations to the sheriff" based on Macon police officers considering joining a labor union. Erickson goes on to say that police do not need to be defended and that unions are bad for the city, bad for the taxpayer and bad for the police. The facts point to a far different conclusion.

Workers who choose to belong to a labor union are more skilled and more productive, have better safety records, have greater longevity and are more dedicated to their jobs. Collective bargaining provides the means for workers and employers to negotiate wages, hours and other conditions of employment. Employers and unions have used dispute resolution systems that allow issues to be resolved quickly and efficiently. Unionized workplaces have fewer discrimination claims and fewer safety complaints, and are able to resolve issues without resorting to expensive and excessive litigation. Thirty-seven percent of public safety workers in the United States are represented by labor unions. Well-managed public agencies are able to work together with labor organizations for the public good.

Councilman Erickson apparently does not recognize a citizen's right to be represented and defended when facing allegations of wrongdoing or the right to peaceful assembly to petition the government to redress grievances. He may want to review the First Amendment to the U. S. Constitution. The U. S. Supreme Court has recognized an employee's right to representation in the Weingarten decision. Police officers as public employees have specific due process rights in the workplace, as spelled out by the court in the Cleveland Board of Education v. Loudermill case. Macon police officers have the right to free speech and association, and to seek redress of workplace grievances. Firing police officers for exercising their constitutional rights can hardly be described as principled. Workers who are represented by a labor organization receive higher wages, and usually have health-care coverage, a pension plan and representation rights. There are costs associated with these benefits. However, these costs are offset by union workers being more productive, more skilled and more dedicated to their jobs. Police officers risk their lives everyday on the job. Why shouldn't the city of Macon invest in those employees who serve and protect our community everyday. Some elected officials know the price of everything without comprehending the value of anything.

American automakers improved the standard of living for American workers for more than 100 years. General Motors, Ford and Chrysler workers represented by the United Auto Workers earned wages and benefits that allowed families to buy homes, enjoy health care, educate their children and support a community's social and economic well being. Economic, trade and health-care policies placed American companies at a competitive disadvantage when competing against foreign automakers that built new plants with government subsidies in the United States. It was not American workers or their unions that failed to build new plants, adopt new designs or provide universal health care. Empty charges of union corruption or "thuggery" are seldom backed up with any evidence. Recent reports of marital infidelity, lying, misappropriation of funds and theft may lead one to conclude that all elected officials are lying, cheating thieves. It makes as much sense as Councilman Erickson's conclusion about union officials.

The most successful police departments in the United States are represented by labor unions. The New York Police Department was not restricted in implementing ComStat in lowering crime rates in New York City. The Boston Police Department worked closely with the unions representing its officers in preventing youth violence. The Macon Police Department would be well-served to listen carefully to the concerns of its police officers. Comparing dedicated police officers to "keystone cops" is counterproductive and demeaning. The Macon community is not granting monopoly power to labor unions. The CATO Institute seeks to dismantle worker rights, labor rights and human rights. The Macon community should respect their police officers' right to assemble and have their grievances redressed through a representative of their choice. Isn't that what our democracy and Constitution guarantees to all citizens?

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