



Friday, Oct 2, 2009

Posted on Fri, Oct. 02, 2009

ERICKSON: Union thuggery

The Telegraph reported this week that the Macon Police Department's officers are thinking of unionizing. Should they, the city should consider shutting down the police department and contracting out the public safety obligations to the sheriff. We would be better off.

I am an inherent defender of police, but when they do something bad, they do not need to be defended.

Unionization is bad for the city, bad for the taxpayer and bad for the police.

Admittedly, we need to do something to improve our police department. Pay is crummy and morale is bad. I have long advocated changes in the department's leadership, and I think we should still consider it. Likewise, we have the ability to implement a pay scale if Macon's City Council were willing to make tough choices about benefits.

Nonetheless, a unionized police force would be cutting off the officers' noses to spite their faces. We should probably consider firing them just on principle.

According to several lawyers I have talked to, unionized police in Georgia do not get the benefits of collective bargaining with the city relating to the terms and benefits of employment. Likewise, they do not get to strike. But they do get to join and pay dues. If they want to throw their money away, sure, let them unionize. Knowing, however, that we have officers on payroll who have no problem throwing money down the drain suggests a purge might be worth considering.

Unions served a useful purpose in this country once, but that time has long since passed. We know that unions drive up costs. American car manufacturers are a testament to union costs and inefficiencies. Non-union automakers routinely out perform union automakers. Union work costs more than non-union work. Union rules regarding employee discipline incentivize lazy, undisciplined and selfish workforces.

We know that unions take thuggery to a new level. All one needs to see are videotapes of health care town halls throughout August. The assemblies might have been vocal, but were without violence until the SEIU and AFL-CIO showed up. A unionized police force would be just one more gang our police would have to deal with.

We know the long-term health of unionized workforces is poor. The steady flow of jobs overseas is due in large part to unionized labor here in the United States. Unfortunately for our taxpayers, we could not export our police force to Mexico, though perhaps we could import some keystone cops who, I am positive, would outperform a long-term unionized police force.

Even though state law seems pretty clear the city does not have to accept collective bargaining with a police union regarding pay and benefits, the city always out-negotiates itself. The city would, however, be wise to note what the libertarian-leaning CATO Institute recently said. "By granting monopoly power to labor unions over the supply of government labor, elected officials undermine their duty to taxpayers, because this puts unions in a privileged position to extract political goods in the form of high pay and benefits that are much higher than anything comparable in the private sector."

Our police are here "to protect and serve." We can rightly ask "who" if the police go union.

Erick Erickson is a Macon City Councilman.