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Controversy Continues To Surround Guns On Campus

By: Joe Murray , The Bulletin

Civil rights advocates charge administrators at the Fort Worth, Texas, Tarrant County College (TCC) placed unconstitutional prohibitions on a symbolic protest organized by students advocating the right to carry concealed weapons on campus.

Students for Concealed Carry on Campus (SCCC), a national organization with 30,000 members supporting "the right of concealed handgun license holders to carry concealed handguns on college campuses," organized an empty holster protest to express discontent with current laws banning concealed weapons on campus. The protest took place during the week of April 21-25 with 3,800 participants stretched over 600 campuses, but TCC was not one of them.

When Brett Poulos, a TCC student and media liaison for SCCC, sought permission to hold the protest on TCC grounds, he explained to TCC South Campus President Ernest L. Thomas, "This 'protest' is not at a set location on campus. The students involved in this event will be attending classes as they would on an everyday basis. There will not be a speech, march or rally of members." The students, however, would be wearing empty holsters.

Mr. Poulos wrote further, "The symbolic point of the Empty Holster Protest is to represent that students, faculty and guests on college campuses are left defenseless by state laws and school policies that refuse to afford concealed handgun license holders the same rights on college campuses that they are afforded virtually everywhere else. The practical point of the Empty Holster Protest is to encourage a dialogue between protesters and individuals who may not know the facts of concealed carry."

In responding to Mr. Poulos' written request, Juan Garcia, Vice President for Student Development, "granted" the request only after he relegated the protest to one area, a free speech zone situated in a location that would hamper the student's ability to communicate their message, and denying the request to wear an empty holster.

The decision angered civil rights advocates.

"TCC has cast aside decades-old Supreme Court precedent strongly protecting symbolic expression by refusing to recognize its students' right to wear empty holsters to make their point," Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE) President Greg Lukianoff said.

Mr. Poulos contacted FIRE when TCC denied him his request, but a month after FIRE wrote TCC explaining their speech code was unconstitutional, TCC has yet to respond.

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