

Reference to a recent NDN article pertaining to a state labor union prematurely endorsing a candidate for Sheriff of Collier County, suggesting that my decision not to seek re-election was predicated on the endorsement.

In the recent article it is alleged by the recipient of a state police union endorsement that I have abandoned some plan to seek re-election due to the ill advised endorsement of this candidate.

There are several problems with his assessment.

Foremost is my own plan to step aside after twenty years of public service at a time that I believe best suits me, my young family and my desire to provide a better and more physically and financially secure life for them. The recent death of my next youngest brother, July 3 of this year reinforced my decision to seek a less stressful and demanding orientation. The murder of a fellow Sheriff's wife at the hands of common scofflaws, the incessant political second guessing and personal attacks, the apparently insatiable desire of inexperienced and ill informed people to concoct self delusional high opinion of their knowledge, skills and abilities as potential Sheriffs and the sheer volume of duties that call me away from home and family militate against my continuing in this position. I choose to retire at term end in a fashion that feels right after five terms of office (20 years) that have been both successful and satisfying.

The timing of my announcement was of my own choosing coinciding purposefully with the birth date of my twin daughters (and myself). I regret that I had to carefully phrase my replies to the many inquiries from supporters as to my future campaign intentions. A premature announcement or worse, leak of information that I would not seek re-election could be very disruptive in the Agency. I regret that I could not disclose my intentions to even my closest supporters for fear that I would inadvertently cause an internal Agency calamity. My family knew and I thought that this sufficed.

As I stated to the reporter, I have never sought but I have received endorsement from unions. I prefer to see law enforcement in a Sheriff's Office remain union free; therefore I have never nor will I ever bargain the welfare of my fellow members for a union endorsement. The Sheriffs of this state have the constitutional authority and statutory capacity to make spontaneous change to conditions of work and design reasonable member benefits and salaries that are right for the member and the public we are sworn to serve. We need not wait for an annual contract review or union ratification to move forward.

Members of the Collier County Sheriff's Office voted down the then most powerful police union in the state in 2003 by a vote of 80% against the union. We did not need the union then and in my opinion we can do better than a union still. In such a circumstance as ours where members oppose collective bargaining as inefficient, ineffective and un-necessarily expensive, endorsement from the union seems more a liability than an asset.

For the record, I have prevailed in every election with and without endorsements from various groups. In the end the elector decides. The NDN would from time to time endorse one of my opponents; without apparent desired effect.

The premature and specious endorsement of a potential candidate for Sheriff prior to entry of the entire candidate cohort, prior to any interview to probe positions on critical issues confronting modern law enforcement and before even a cursory review of the entire candidate field's experience smacks of cronyism. Clearly the union knows something about this potential candidate and his plan than we or the public do.

Endorsements are a part of the election scene and usually a hotly contested area of interest. However, I believe it is better to go endorsement bare than accept a bogus endorsement.

Don Hunter, Sheriff
Collier County