



Transcript

Mayor Franklin's Press Conference Opposition to HB89

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Transcription by Will Adams

SFranklin: As mayors against illegal guns, we recognize when we see legislation ah, that is going to make it harder for us to protect the citizens of our cities. And some 250 mayors: independents, democrats, conservatives, republicans, and liberals, have come together for the last two years, ah, to take a stand against illegal guns. But today, I am joined by this group, ah, of citizens and citizen leaders, elected officials, ah, to ask Governor Perdue HB 89, because while we are aware that it addresses the issue of legal guns, there is a direct public policy and public safety risk that all of us clearly understand.

If, as this bill allows, guns are permitted, legal guns are permitted, on public transit, restaurants, parks, bars, and even at the airport, it will have a negative effect on the public safety of people who live in Atlanta, who live around Atlanta and in Georgia, who visit Atlanta, who invest in Atlanta. And with that I'm going to turn the program over, ah, to Commissioner, to chairman Eaves, if he'd like to make some comments, and then we'll move to Alice Johnson.

JEaves: Good morning. I'm John Eaves, Chairman of the Fulton County Board of Commissioners, and I want to thank the mayor for convening this press conference and I am incredibly impressed with this strong coalition of people who are against this house bill. About two weeks ago, the Fulton Country board of Commissioners got a briefing from our legislative team about this bill, and we expressed our, our concern about it. There was no formal action taken; however, I'm here personally to show my, ah, displeasure about the bill and my urging of the Governor to not sign the bill, to veto it, and I'm concerned about the public safety of our communities and concerned about our parks, our restaurants. But more importantly, I'm also concerned about the possibility of weapons used on our public transportation. So I'm here, arm in arm, shoulder to shoulder, with Mayor Franklin, as well as all of those who are behind me, showing our displeasure and our urging of the Governor to veto this bill. Thank you.

SF: Thank you. We'll have several other speakers and we'll go down our list and then open it up for anyone else. Our council member, ah, Norwood, has joined us.

Let me get my list.

Ah, chief...I think we're going to have Alice Johnson next, ah, then Chief Pennington, Dr Beverly Scott, ah, Diane Harnell Cohen, Ron Wolf, and then DeCosta, and then we'll open it up for anyone else who'd like to speak.

AJohnson: Thank you mayor. My name is Alice Johnson, I'm the executive director of Georgians for Gun Safety. We are the organization, the advocacy group that has been tracking HB89 from its original inception back in the legislative session of 2007.

There are others here who will speak very eloquently about some of the posit, the, ah, sections of the bill, but I would like to say that this effort, and particularly the sections of the legislation which involve mass transit, public transit, and restaurants that serve alcohol, are pieces of the legislation which never received any of the kind of scrutiny that we normally expect of our legislation at the General Assembly. Those portions of the bill were never heard in committee, there was never any testimony given, no one ever had the opportunity to stand up in that setting to talk about how bad this bill is, about how bad the impact will be on citizens. We're very concerned about the likelihood that the transfer of law enforcement functions will be made by this bill to anyone who has fifteen dollars and can pass a fingerprint check. And what you will hear from others perhaps is that somehow the laws in Georgia are more restrictive than others. That is not the case. Most of the states around us require training in order to get a permit. They require psychological screenings in some cases. They also prevent those firearms, prohibit those firearms, from being in those locations that we are objecting to today.

Um, this legislation, is a massive overhaul of gun laws in Georgia. It flies in the face of the study committee, which the author of the legislation, and which Senator Seabaugh both introduced, in order to try to do a comprehensive study of firearm laws in Georgia. That, ah, initiative is something we supported. This bill completely circumvents that process.

RPennington: Ahem. Good morning. I'm Richard Pennington, Chief of Police Atlanta, and ah, many of the Chiefs throughout the state of Georgia have, ah, concerns about this bill as well, and we know that, ah, individuals that carry guns, or possess guns, into restaurants, parks, public transportations, and especially the airport; we have grave concerns about that. And we know that, with all the problems we have currently dealing with illegal guns, we just think that this will enhance the number of problems that we will experience in the city of Atlanta, and especially with the law enforcement agencies in the municipalities and throughout the state of Georgia. And so, I'm encouraging the Governor to veto the bill as well. Thank you.

BScott: Good morning, I'm Beverly Scott, the general manager and chief executive officer of MARTA. Ah we, very very strongly, ah, encourage the Governor to veto this legislation, ah, at MARTA we carry over five hundred thousand passengers on a daily basis. We have a direct connection into Hartsfield airport, which is the busiest airport in the country. The, ah, since 9-11, the ah, even the ah, government accounting office has been very clear to identify the fact that transit facilities, are in fact, a number one terrorist focal point, internationally, and that transit facilities, particularly rail and bus facilities, have been noted. How many...London, Paris, Mumbai, OK, that are noted as being, ah, ah, Madrid. Focal points for terrorist activity. And this would not in fact wind up in any way being something that we can support, ah, it may have been well intentioned, but this would not be good public policy. We very much take the responsibility that we have at the authority, seriously, in the area of security, safety, and this would provide a major block in terms of our ability to do this. It is...this is not something that is esoteric, for me on a personal level. I was in fact in the World Trade Center in 93' when the first attacks took place and so when I tell you that transit facilities, are a real target for, these types of activities and we would be completely compromised at MARTA. This is something that is deadly serious, and it is one that is fueled for me by, ah, personal experience. Thank you.

DCohen: Dianne Harnell Cohen, Commissioner of Parks and Affairs. I join the other members of this coalition to urge the Governor to veto this legislation. This is also personal to us in the area of parks. Safety is the number one issue that we have for the constituents and visitors of Atlanta. And assuring that they're safe, um, is a very very big responsibility for us. We work very closely with the Atlanta Police Department. They are also overwhelmed and adding this burden would be extremely dangerous.

Just last month we had an incident at Cohen Park, um, one of our recreation centers, when guns were shot through the recreation center. That is a center that is used for children that could have been horrific. Anything that opens up any more availability for any of that, we would strongly strongly recommend against, so we urge a veto on this bill. Thank you very much.

RWolf: Good morning, I'm Ron Wolf. I'm the CEO of the Georgia Restuarant Association. We have, ah, publicly opposed any additional gun legislation for the last three years. This particular bill we have serious concerns about. Ah, number one, I've heard it often said that there are enforcement policies in this bill that would, ah, permit us to prevent someone from carrying a gun into a restaurant that serves alcohol. The problem with it is its based on an honor system. I can assure you that its not the restaurants capability or is it its intent to be asking their customers if they're packing a gun. Its not practicable its not reasonable. We have concerns about liability in a crowded restaurant. We also know the fact of mixing alcohol and mixing weapons is simply bad business, so we ask that the Governor please consider vetoing House Bill 89. Thank you.

BDeCosta: I'm Ben DeCosta, aviation manager at Atlanta Hartsfield Jackson. Before the passage of House Bill 89, the only guns at the worlds busiest airport were the Atlanta Police Department, Federal Air Marshals, the FBI, law enforcement. With the passage of this bill, it makes unclear there will be other guns at the airport. It's the worlds busiest airport, often very crowded. This is no place for people who are not law enforcement to have weapons, especially in today's world as pointed out by Commissioner Scott. So we too join the mayor, asking the Governor to veto this bill. This is not the right bill and not the right time. Thank you.

SFranklin: Um, are there others that would like to speak? Yes. Identify yourself too.

BWest: Benita West, president of Amalgamated Transit Union local 732. We represent the MARTA, Gwinnett, Cobb, Clayton county workers. And on behalf of the bus operators, we are strongly, we strongly oppose this bill. Um, there has been, if you all watch the news, there have been a lot of assaults on operators. We are concerned that this will only escalate the problem that we already dealing with. There is a petition by our operators, where they are asking to be shielded now, based on the legislation before us. So, we are encouraging the Governor to please, veto this bill. Ah, there is...currently there is no state funding for transit. We are concerned on the union side, our operators safety. Also our patrons safety. They are concerned, what are there. There has been no discussion of what's their role, if they see a gun shown on a bus. No one has talked about what is the operator to do. As it was spoken earlier by the, uh, Recreation Commissioner, MARTA police department, also, they do a very good job, but that would be an additional duties...there would be additional duties that would make them also overwhelmed. So we are encouraging not only the Governor, community to please call and ask the Governor to veto this bill. Thank you.

AFarmer: I'm Anne Farmer, council member from district six. This bill has lots of technical reasons why it doesn't make sense and everybody here has spoken to that. I want to speak to what happens sometime beyond that. It is quite easy if your carrying a gun to get irritated, scared, or whatever, to get a gun and shoot whoever is the person that's eliciting that response. Ah, I can tell you from personal experience that, ah, my dad was killed by somebody in the workplace who had a gun, and there was, there was several people in the room and there was no way to defend yourself. So I would say the personal side, the side of families, is critical for vetoing this bill.

CMuller: Thank you. Claire Muller, Atlanta City Council and transportation chair. I'm extremely concerned about the public transit and the airport implications if this bill is not vetoed. Um, and Parks and Police have already spoken as well as Doctor Scott and Mister DeCosta from MARTA and the airport, and I encourage all of our citizens to encourage the Governor to veto this bill. It would be very very difficult for us to continue protecting our citizens if this is an added element.

SFranklin: Anyone else? Well were open for questions. Yes?

JG: This is a question for Dr. Scott.

SFranklin: Would you identify yourself?

JG: Jim Galloway, Journal Constitution. Of course there is a strong possibility that the Governor will sign HB89. Have you folks started to develop any protocols for MARTA officers on how to deal with spotted weapons? Can you tell us what's going on here?

BScott: Yes, we have. We have begun our contingency planning in the event that this would occur. And I'll be...well first I'm going to hope that it doesn't, and at the time if we would not be successful, we'll be prepared to go through with ah, an implementation plan relative to our, to our folks.

JG: If officers, if they spot a gun, will they approach a person and ask to see if there is a weapons permit?

BScott: At this point in time I'm not prepared to go into that level of detail with you.

SF: We are all going to be very surprised if the Governor signs this bill. Identify myself? Oh yeah, Shirley Franklin. You've heard a lot of voices, that's fine. Standing with Dr. Scott and a few dozen people who are concerned about this bill. All of us recognize that public officials are faced with difficult choices. This is no different for the Governor. However this is so serious, in stead of holding an individual press conference, each of us chose to come together to say that we represent tens of thousands of people, either as elected officials or as appointed officials, who believe that this is a deadly bill and therefore must be vetoed. So we are operating under the assumption that our voices will be heard.

Speaker unidentified: So why would you be so surprised if the Governor signs this bill?

SF: Because I attended the eggs and issues breakfast. At which point the Governor expressed that he did not think that this was a good bill.

[?]: That was only because of the parking lot provision...

SF: Well, with that said, at least we know that he was thinking about it, this is not about the right to bear arms. This is about public safety. And there are literally thousands of people represented by those who stand here today. And we believe we represent not just voices in Atlanta or metro Atlanta, but that we represent voices from across the state of Georgia. And it was very important that we come together.

I was so confident that the mayor, that the Governor would veto this bill I was hesitant to call a press conference. However, in the. Yes, I was confident that he would veto this bill. However, I heard from so many people that it was important for our voices to be heard, both by the public, and by the Governor, and by the members of the General Assembly, that I gave into this press conference and we called it today.

[?]: What about the business community?

SF: Well we have the hotel unions that are here with us today. We have the Atlanta Conventions and Visitors Bureau that is with us today. And last I checked, I represent, as an elected official, business people as well.

[?]: If he signs it, is anybody prepared for legal action?

SF: We're not dealing with "if" today. We don't believe its possible that the Governor will sign this bill. We think he will veto it, and we are here to give him the moral support to do so.

LG: Mayor Franklin, we have heard a lot of arguments...Lori Gary (sp?) WSB-TV. We've heard a lot of arguments from the other side that this bill is for the law abiding citizens, and that this could maybe prevent a shooting like that happened at Georgia Tech. What is your argument, counter argument to that?

SF: Well there was lots of testimony to that in the General Assembly. But I would like just to take us back to a bigger issue and I won't describe all the details. If you look at gun legislation around the world, and you look at the number of gun crimes, you can see a direct relationship between gun control and a reduction of violent crime. You can look at Canada, you can look at India, I mean you can look all over the world. So this notion that Americans are the only ones who need to be safe doesn't, doesn't fly. We're not challenging, we're not challenging the right to bear arms. We are saying that there are circumstances, and those circumstances are like these: what do you do with a parks worker or a bus driver, a transit worker or a police officer, who has no idea when they walk into the dogwood festival with a hundred thousand people, or the Peachtree Road Race? The presumption is, the presumption has to be if this bill passes, that there are concealed weapons by people that might just get mad with them. The presumption needs to be in order to have a safe city, that there are no concealed weapons, and only those who are acting criminally might have them. This isn't a common sense bill.

JMayer: John Mayer...(inaudible)...WXIA-TV. Do you have, you talked about neighboring states and so forth, do we have any, since many other states allow, to some extent some of what House Bill 89 is proposing. Do we have any data from any of those states that shows that violent crime went up because of those laws?

SF: We have evidence from all over the world that when you don't have, when you have gun control, the violent crime goes down. The mayor of Ahmadabad, India. The mayor of, ah, Port-of-Spain, Trinidad. The mayor of Toronto, the mayor of Montreal. There is plenty of evidence.

Now, Alice Johnson will be glad to talk to you about the evidence around, ah, the surrounding states. But folks, we live...we can't say today, on today Thursday, ah that we are only in Georgia, and tomorrow say we want to be connected to the world. Traveling to China and traveling...and having these global connections. Are we world citizens, or are we isolated in the State of Georgia? I prefer to believe that we are connected with the rest of the world and have to learn from best practices worldwide. Believe it or not, there are best practices around the world. And one of them is gun control.

Alice?

AJohnson: Uhm, I can answer that, that question, uhm, Dennis, sort of. Uhm, gun laws in the United States, uhm, are very complicated. And while the State of Georgia has a public gathering section, which says that there are many places where concealed weapons carry permit holders are prevented from purchas...from carrying their firearms. There are many other circumstances which, uhm, work on that. For instance, in Tennessee, in South Carolina, in Florida, where concealed carry, uhm, has some prohibitions, but not the public gathering section code that we have in Georgia. They all require training in order to get a permit. And even with that, in the State of Florida, there have been very serious concerns that have been actually identified by the Sun-Sentinel, uhm, newspaper about those folks who managed to get around the permit system, who managed to get around the fingerprint system, get a gun anyway, get a permit anyway even though they're not supposed to, and then go on to commit violent acts. So, their, the..the.. the verdict is not in that somehow allowing private citizens to carry firearms and use them in situations based on their judgement, even if they are trained, is...in any way gonna make the community safer. There are nuances in those kinds of gun laws all across the country. But the bottom line is: do we want untrained, unscreened, uhm, citizens, taking on law enforcement functions? If guns save lives, then they are only saving lives in the hands of law enforcement.

SF: We have other people who have joined us, ah, State Senators, State Representatives. We've offered the microphone to anyone else that would like to speak. Is there anyone...else that would like to speak?

Okay, Identify yourself.

I'm Suzanna (inaudible) of Georgia Public Broadcasting and I have a question for Mr. DeCosta. Uhm, the bill as it has been written I think does exempt whatever federal laws are in effect. It supercedes, of course. The airport right now, is it by federal law that no one can have guns there or, or where does it...I know you said it was an issue that someone can take a gun on MARTA to the airport, but then, can't take it...

BD: By state law the airport is excluded from a place where a person can carry a gun. House Bill 89 puts that under a cloud. And so, a licensed gun owner now can argue that although the state statute of Georgia says that you can't bring a gun to an air terminal, that this new law allows a person to bring it to a restaurant. We have many restaurants at the airport, and you can use it on public transit, like MARTA. There is a MARTA station there at the airport. And so it opens a question, as to whether or not police officers, law enforcement at the airport, can be assured that they're the only ones with guns, ah, at the world's busiest airport.

JG: I have a question. Jim Galloway, Journal Constitution. Is it...many of the advocates of HB89 say that this is necessary because they don't feel safe on MARTA and other forms of transportation. What's your reply to that?

SF: Do they ride? I mean I'd ask the first question. I mean we'd love to get more people to ride. So I'll put my hand up to say that I rarely ride. So for me to begin talking about how I feel on MARTA, ah, is directly related to whether I ride or not. Ah, almost a half a million people ride a day, MARTA. I hear from passengers, on a regular basis. I meet people who fly in and out of the airport, who ride MARTA to their hotels, to their meetings. And they talk about how safe they feel. But since I'm only talking anecdotally, I will turn it over to Dr. Scott.

BScott: Well the mayor is so...that would be my first one. Is, is ah, j-just simply say on what experience, ok? We have an extremely safe system. There's no question but that uhm, we're a mirror of, a microcosm of the society within which we live. But I can tell you that we have an extremely effective department. We have ah, put in extremely...a great amount of resources. Uhm, in fact, a tremendous increase in resources just over the last couple of years. And our best indicator in terms of how people feel about our system is actually what our, our customers say. We do an annual survey of over 7,000, and theirs....and what they've said to us is that they're feeling that we're doing even more and more in that area. And so, aside from that just being something that someone would anecdotally say. I...I can't give...I really can't give credence to it. And I suppose what I would come back to is to simply say this: the method in which I would choose to wind up handling security and safety on the MARTA system is not by vigilantism. And if that's what we're going to wind up ah, ah, deteriorating to, then I would submit to you that that, in and of itself, is just an incorrect way to go. That's insanity.

SF: And a couple other questions? Yes. Identify yourself, please?

[?] (inaudible)...WABE news. I have a question for Dr. Scott. Are you aware of any other public transit systems in the country that do allow guns on their...

BScott: There are a handful...and I think the issue is really this, ok. Is that this bill is explicitly per...is explicitly permitting it to occur in the State of Georgia, okay. So when you start talking about other states and states that are explicitly saying that its okay, there are only a handful, okay? Texas is one, ah, I think Oklahoma another. Just a very handful where there has been an explicit...went in, took away what your normal rights would be as a property owner or whatever and said look, you have no....you have no right to say how you think things should happen within your facility. We're going to tell you how. We're going to legislate that for you. And that's the difference in this case because there are only a handful of places where that's occurred.

WABE news reporter: And have you seen any documented results from that?

BScott: Well we've talked, okay? We've talked to, uhm, some of our counterparts who have vigorously opposed these things in other places. And even though the evidence, the discussion has been an anecdotal, there's no question but that they've had to put tremendous additional, ah, resources into the whole issue of security, because in fact now, rather than being able to make the presumption that there are not concealed weapons, they have to make the presumption that there are concealed weapons. And I...I...I really don't want to get into talking about what some of our counterparts have specifically stated to us in some other places. But it has not....it has not been a good experience.

SF: Uhm, were just about finished? Yes.

WABE news reporter: Just one more question. Do we know, when we're talking about evidence...

SF: Identify yourself.

Lori Gary (sp?) from WSB-TV news.

SF: Are you talking to me or....

LG: It might be the chief, I guess. Or may be the assistant chief.

SF: All right. Go ahead.

LG: How many shootings are by licensed permit holders in the City of Atlanta? Do we know like on a yearly basis? Do you compile that data?

ADrayer: Good morning. Assistant Chief Drayer, Atlanta Police Department. The chief had to step out to another meeting. Ah, you know we can compile that data for you. Ah, you know, very few are committed by license weapon holders. But lets just say that the Atlanta Police Department is, is prepared to enforce the law...as it turns out.

SF: Anyone else? Any other questions? You've been very generous with your time. The media? Anyone else here? Last chance. Ah, we certainly appreciate the state representatives and state senators that have joined us. Members of the business community, the elected officials. Ah, the public officials, the private citizens who feel very strongly about this. Ah, this is a show of force, representing literally thousands of employees, ah, thousands of citizens. Ah, hundreds of businesses. The City of Atlanta and several other public entities. All saying that this is a grave concern to us, and we urge the Governor to veto House Bill 89. Thank you very much.