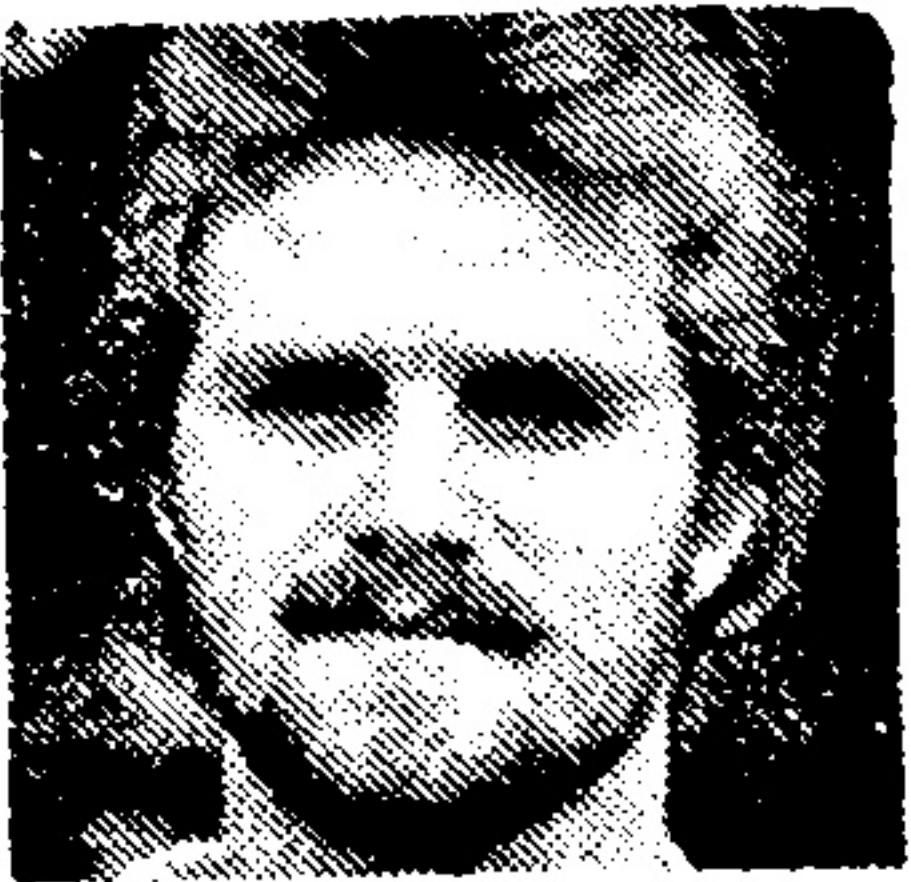


Council turns deaf ear to public handgun cry



Scott Williams

I have always encouraged political activism because I find it extremely irritating when someone grumbles about injustice without taking any constructive action.

Political activism, however, is a two-way street. And in order to accomplish anything, citizens have to have elected officials who are willing to listen.

Perhaps that is why political activism does not work in this town.

DeKalb 6th Ward Alderman Steve Brody is fighting an uphill battle in trying to prove the existence of local support for handgun control. His efforts are being complicated by nearly everything except a lack of local support.

Brody is faced with a belligerent gun merchant and city officials who apparently have already made up their minds.

Gun shop owner Tom Valos is trying to oust Brody from office because of Brody's efforts to establish a handgun ordinance. One of Valos' charges, ironically, is that Brody is promoting personal interests.

One cannot help but wonder whether Valos would be hounding Brody so if Valos were in, say, the fertilizer business.

Apparently, Brody also is faced with having to convince the city's aldermen, who have already decided the fate of handgun legislation in DeKalb.

Mayor Greg Sparrow recently said at least five of Brody's six fellow aldermen are "leaning" towards opposition of handgun legislation -- and Brody has not even written an ordinance yet.

It seems the only problem Brody doesn't have is getting support from the citizens.

In the last four weeks, an NIU student organization has collected more than 1,100 signatures of people who support local handgun legislation.

But Sparrow illustrated just how willing the city council would be to listen to Brody.

"Brody can get 10,000 signatures on a petition and come in and try to browbeat the council, but it won't work," the mayor said.

Perhaps DeKalb citizens should try to get 100,000 signatures on a petition. Maybe that would convince aldermen that their constituents want to see a local handgun control ordinance.

Or is threatening someone's job the only way to get any attention around here?

Sparrow and some aldermen have managed to sidestep the issue altogether by simply saying an ordinance is unnecessary because there is no problem with handguns in DeKalb.

But, if DeKalb has no problem with handguns, then who is Valos selling guns to? And who are the other seven gun dealers in the area selling guns to?

How is the city council going to discover there is a problem with handguns other than to wait until a DeKalb citizen gets shot?

Sparrow and the other aldermen seem to be following the lead of the DeKalb County Board, which did not pass a smoke detector ordinance until an NIU student died in an apartment fire in unincorporated DeKalb County.

But there is a significant distinction that should be made.

There was not much local interest in a county smoke detector ordinance until after the fatal fire. But, as far as handgun control goes, the council does not have to wait for a similar tragedy to gauge public sentiment -- there already is a significant portion of the city actively supporting gun control.

It seems, however, the political activists this time are voicing their opinions into a vacuum.

I still encourage political activism. But, in the face of nearsighted politicians, I seriously wonder if it really makes a difference.

Scott Williams is a reporter for The Northern Star.