

Public comments on “Second Amendment Sanctuary”—Montgomery County Board of Supervisors, Christiansburg, VA, November 25, 2019
James C. Klagge

Good evening. My name is James Klagge and I live at 220 Huntington Lane in Blacksburg.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak to the board about significant issues facing the people of this county. I know there are many people in the county who care deeply about issues before us. Ladies and gentlemen of the board, many of the people here tonight are the “good guys with a gun” that we hear so much about. (Would those here who are “good guys with a gun” please raise their hand?) In those rare instances in which it is “a good guy with a gun that stops a bad guy with a gun”, I am grateful. Many folks this evening are wearing a sticker that says “Guns save lives”. I agree that guns save lives.

But guns also cost lives.

We are told that gun violence is more about mental health than it is about gun laws. But we have a shortage of mental health professionals, mental health facilities and beds in Southwest Virginia. If you are here to advocate for gun rights, I hope you are also here to advocate for expanded mental health care.

Who are the “bad guys with a gun” that we all fear? They are young people who dropped out of school as soon as they could. They are people addicted to opioids with no other way to satisfy their addiction. They are people with minimum wage jobs that can’t find a way to support a family or navigate a future. If you are here to advocate for gun rights, I hope you are also here to advocate for better schools and vocational training, better drug-treatment facilities and health care, better paying jobs with livable wages, instead of an endless stream of minimum wage jobs that lead nowhere. What would Montgomery County look like if all the political energy we see here tonight were to support Republican Bill Stanley’s bill for a statewide bond issue to support school construction statewide, including Southwest Virginia? Or to support Democrat Creigh Deeds’ bill for expanded mental health facilities statewide, including Southwest Virginia? Or to support a move toward a post-coal economy statewide that would sustain not only our bread-winners but also our grandchildren’s environment, including here in Southwest Virginia?

Often the bad guy with a gun is a domestic abuser. If you are here to advocate for gun rights, I hope you are also here to advocate for means to keep guns out of the hands, not only of convicted abusers, but also of those who would terrorize their own families with threats of violence.

Sometimes there is no “bad guy”, but only a toddler who found an unsecured gun, or a troubled adolescent who sees a gun as an easy way out of suicidal depression. If you are here to advocate for gun rights, I hope you are also here to advocate for means to protect these young people, who have no thoughts of harming others.

If the only time we turn out in political protests is to protect gun rights or protest tax increases, then we will get what we deserve—an over-armed neighborhood defending a decaying community. Let’s put our focus on building a community *worth* defending—one with adequate medical and mental health care, well-funded schools, and sustainable well-paying jobs. This is what we need to be advocating for—before our supervisors and before our state legislators. Otherwise they can write us off with a good conscience as long as they give us our gun rights, and go on ignoring all the things that are worth living for.

Thank you, and thanks for your service to our community.