Written by By Cody Begaye Sun Correspondent
Friday, 08 March 2019 10:17





Unanimous decision made during a special meeting

The crowd filled the third floor meeting room of the McKinley County Courthouse to capacity, pouring out into the lobby and first floor rotunda.

People had gathered to hear a reading of and voice either their support or opposition to a resolution presented to the Board of Commissioners that would preserve the Second Amendment of the United States Constitution and declare McKinley County a Second Amendment Sanctuary County.

A Second Amendment Sanctuary County has adopted resolutions to not enforce certain gun control measures that are seen as violating the Second Amendment. San Juan, Eddy, Curry, Quay, Socorro and Union counties are among some of the New Mexico counties that have adopted these sanctuary resolutions.

McKinley County Sheriff Ron Silversmith presented the resolution to the board Feb. 27.

“[This resolution] doesn’t mean the criminal element will be free to do whatever they please,” he said. “We will prosecute them to the fullest, and we will protect law-abiding citizens in the county.”

Silversmith said during the meeting that this resolution would allow McKinley County to be in line with around 29 other counties across the state on the matter, and that this was a heated topic.

He added that by presenting and supporting this resolution, he is fulfilling his oath as sheriff to defend and uphold the constitution.

Tony Mace, Cibola County sheriff, spoke in support for the resolution at the meeting. He reaffirmed that 30 out of 33 elected sheriffs across New Mexico support a Second Amendment Sanctuary or have become a Second Amendment Sanctuary County sheriff.

He added that the state and county should aim to enforce the laws that are already in place instead of trying to create new ones.

Mace also agreed with Silversmith that supporting this resolution to become a Second Amendment Sanctuary is part of fulfilling his oath to protect the citizens’ constitutional rights.

“This is not a law we’re trying to enact, we’re trying to give citizens an opportunity to support sheriffs and rights,” Mace said during the meeting.

Mace spoke with the *Sun* after the meeting about the resolution, which he said was drafted by McKinley County in response to six bills that are currently being debated in Santa Fe at the first session of the 54th New Mexico Legislature.

The bills in question are Senate Bill 8, which relates to crime and calls for a background check during a firearm sale; House Bill 83, relating to domestic affairs and mental health; House Bill 87, which relates to domestic violence and firearm possession; and House Bill 130, which speaks to additional firearm crimes and penalties.

In addition, Mace named several bills that are not as pressing, but nevertheless influenced the decision to draft and present the resolution.

He specified House Bill 101, relating to public safety and requiring fingerprints to renew a concealed carry licence; and Senate Bill 146, declaring making a school threat a fourth degree felony.

As of Feb. 27, none of the bills have been finalized and are either in the Senate Public Affairs Committee, House Consumer and Public Affairs Committee, or the House Judiciary Committee.

When asked what the issue was with each bill listed, Mace said that some items like background checks are unable to be enforced, while other bills are overreaching and violate either other constitutional amendments or due process.

“We are engaged in this process to enact the laws that we can use,” Mace said. “The bills [we’re against] don’t impact criminals, but law-abiding citizens.”

The audience, many of whom were present to voice their support, echoed Mace’s thoughts.

Matt Hughbanks, a former county deputy, said that if the commission voted against the resolution it would be a detriment to everyone in the county.

“We ask that you stand your ground,” Hughbanks said to the board. “We have your back. We are McKinley County.”

Pastor Martin Eastridge, of the Tohatchi United Pentecostal Church and an Army veteran, told the board that he is glad that local lawmakers are willing to listen when lawmakers in Santa Fe are not.

“The country has to talk to our people and not just our politicians,” he said. “So we [need this resolution] to punish the criminals and not the citizens.”

Mayor Jackie McKinney was present at the meeting to voice his support for the resolution.

“An important message has to be sent to accept the will of [the] American people, especially voters of New Mexico,” he said. “If we don’t hold the criminals accountable, these discussions will be ongoing. Stand for the constitutional right of every American.”

McKinney added that the United States Constitution is one of the most brilliant documents written, and that its role and words are crucial in protecting future generations.

Despite the overwhelming majority of supporters, there were a number of detractors of the resolution who had a moment to speak.

One speaker said that over the years advocate groups like the NRA have changed their mission, and put the interests of firearm manufacturers before the people. The speaker then told the county that there is no reason to make the decision quickly and blindly.

Accountability was another issue that was brought up, with one speaker saying that a county’s laws can change with the sheriff. This speaker asked who would be accountable if trouble rises from the term of one sheriff to another.

Commissioners Billy Moore and Tommy Nelson said they support the resolution and thanked

the people for their support, saying that it's important that the citizens know what is being discussed.

Commission Chairman Bill Lee said it's difficult to discuss hot button topics, such as the state's proposed gun bills, and reminded the crowd that the legislation is still being discussed in Santa Fe. He urged those in the room to contact their elected officials and voice their opinions to the people making the decisions.

"Your voice is being heard here, but you have to make it heard in Santa Fe," Lee said.

The resolution carried with a 3-0 vote, and to the applause of many people in the courthouse.

By Cody Begaye
Sun Correspondent