

Senate Bill 11 also known as the Campus Carry bill was signed by Texas Governor Abbot on June 13, 2015 at the Red's Indoor Range, 'a popular gun store and shooting range' in Pflugerville. This bill will come into effect on August 1, 2016—a memorable day in the history of Texas when mass murder took place on the campus of University of Texas, Austin by a student armed with weapons.

The passage of Senate Bill 11 and the public universities now taking steps to implement this bill has given rise to a wave of protests across university campuses in Texas. Several local, national and international news networks have covered these protests, interviewed both students and professors to gain their perspective on this subject. I will at present reserve my comments on the media's coverage of this serious issue for another time and focus only on why SB-11 is a dangerous and irresponsible piece of unjust legislation.

During the past few years as this bill was being proposed and debated in the legislature representatives from universities across Texas including Chancellor McRaven, university presidents, faculty, students and campus police chiefs had repeatedly urged the legislature that this was an unnecessary piece of legislation. It is an open secret that this piece of legislation was passed at the insistence of the pro-gun lobbies and their nexus with politicians marginalizing the concerns of those representing universities where this bill is to be implemented.

The language in which SB11 is crafted states that 'a license holder may carry a concealed handgun on or about the license holder's person while the license holder is on campus.' It further insists the 'universities may not adopt any rule, regulation, or other provision prohibiting license holders from carrying handguns on university campuses.' Furthermore the language of the bill explicitly states that no provisions shall be established to 'generally prohibit or have the effect of generally prohibiting license holders from carrying concealed handguns on campus.'

This stringent language of SB11 deliberately handicaps public universities in taking effective action against this unjust bill and makes apparently an open and shut case of allowing concealed handguns carried by license holders on university campuses. This bill permits private universities to prohibit license holders from carrying handguns on their campuses. It does not grant the same freedom of decision-making to public universities. Thus while many private universities across Texas have opted out of campus carry, public universities are being made the scapegoat of this dangerous political experiment. SB11 deliberately creates another unnecessary and discriminatory divide in the atmosphere of learning between public and private universities.

Furthermore, the only two conditions under which a license holder is deemed to have committed an offense under this legislation are the following: (a) a license holder carries a partially or wholly visible handgun, regardless of whether the handgun is holstered on or about the license holder's person, (b) a license holder intentionally or knowingly displays the handgun in plain view of another person. These two conditions under which a license holder might be considered to have committed an offense make a game-play of conditions of visibility and invisibility.

Campus Carry and Speaking

Dr. Ritu Mathur, Assistant Professor, Dept.



It is only a police officer that can ask a person on university campus whether the person carrying a weapon is a license holder or not and that too under conditions of established threat. No one else can oblige or compel a person to divulge whether this person is carrying a licensed weapon or not. University campuses are often very large, well populated, open spaces and it is difficult to determine who is entering or exiting the campus with a licensed weapon or not. In the absence of gun registries and with the universities especially having no resources to build and maintain these registries the act of determining who is or is not a license holder is a complicated and risky task leave alone ascertaining the number of weapons in possession.

To argue that the establishment of specific exclusion zones on university campuses can help address this problem is another attempt to defuse the tension from this problem without addressing it seriously. It is the design, range and especially the impact of the weapon that renders all designation of exclusion zones and

signage a superfluous exercise on campuses. It is in war zones that exclusion zones are created for safe passage of civilians under attack. Universities have no reason to take recourse to establishment of exclusion zones as they have always been considered open spaces of learning and growth. The very pace at which this language of exclusion zones on university campuses is gaining currency to implement this bill indicates the threat of a growing militarization of society.

Soldiers and police officers undergo several years of disciplined

faculty and students. Students question professors whether they will now arm themselves and professors express concerns about engaging with students disinterested in a topic of learning or dissatisfied with their grades and suffering from other health and financial issues. SB11 has placed another mental burden of unnecessary stress and divisiveness in a workplace and vitiated an atmosphere of learning with suspicion.

This will gradually eat into the foundations of trust that a professor needs to build with her students to help nurture growth and

learning skills. For centuries universities have undertaken the task of training and guiding the youth to cultivate the art of listening, reasoning, debating, developing social and productive skills. It is precisely this transition towards maturity and adulthood that has been facilitated without any recourse to possession of weapons on campuses. Universities seek to empower students with words not weapons. If weapons could resolve our problems what would be the need to send young minds to universities to learn and empower themselves with good quality education?

SB11 will also have an impact on quality of university education in Texas. This serious concern does not seem to register with politicians supposedly acting in public interest. Some of them have publicly issued statements that professors living in ivory towers like to have their own way and even if a few hundred professors resign in protest against SB11 this will only be a welcome development. These statements then lead press reporters to ask professors in interviews if they are considering leaving. In response, some of us have stated that it is our responsibility to speak truth to power, no matter how unpleasant and unpalatable and that

we will not leave. But whether Texas public universities will in future be able to attract and retain top intellectual talent in research and teaching remains in serious doubt.

The spate of gun shootings on university campuses has become a quizzing exercise in terms of how many killed, how many weapons used, shots fired, whether the campus was conceal carry or not, whether the path ahead is more campus carry or not. It is almost as if the number of shootings, the growing number of weapons has become an everyday reality of our existence. We must reinvigorate the spirit of questioning and protest to counter this dangerous and complex everyday reality. A complex reality of burgeoning legislation, expanding and profiting markets for weapons and numerical game of dead and dying cannot be accepted with complacency. It has benumbed our mind and our feelings. It has made us forget that laws are written by men to serve political purposes. Laws such as SB11 can and must be questioned, amended and repealed. It is a long and uphill struggle but one that must be waged.

ng Truth to Power in Texas

pt of Political Science & Geography, UTSA



Photo: UTgunfree.org

training in the use of weapons and the principles of laws of war in the use of weapons are instilled into them. But in Texas it is commonly acknowledged by politicians too that handguns are easily available in Texas and it is on precisely these grounds that they fear settlement of refugees in this state as they might get easy access to weapons. The licensing system in Texas itself is a subject of ridicule as it is easy to get a license with less than ten hours of training shooting fixed targets. The cost of procuring these weapons at gun shows is often considered to be cheaper than university textbooks. Now with this added existential reality of SB11 are students and professors to choose between books and handguns?

The passage of SB11 undermines faith in our campus police force and encourages those attending university to arm themselves. This discourages an understanding in the youth of social, community based existence served by public institutions and promotes hyper-individualism that gradually erodes a social, public order. It also deliberately fosters an atmosphere of distrust and fear amongst