

The rest of the Story... a DEA created Fiasco.

Robert L Greer, Mayor City of Bridgeport

In my youth Paul Harvey, a noted radio commentator did a daily news piece where he told us "the rest of the story". Harvey would remind us of a recent news story and then after a commercial break come back and give all the back story behind the news item.

The past several months a Bridgeport Councilperson has not only been a vocal minority on this council but has taken it upon himself to champion the DEA Tactical Diversion Squad without regard to the majority of council.

To fully understand the back story on the DEA TDS you must go back to the summer of 2015, when the councilperson to my right advised that the Northern District of WV, a federal jurisdiction did not have a DEA TDS and he would like Bridgeport to lead the call for the creation of such a unit. There were questions and education of the council and then unanimously the City called for the creation of TDS. However, one of the questions asked and answered by Mr. Maxey was would Bridgeport, like it had in the Harrison County Drug Task Force be called upon for either financial support or assign manpower as even then Bridgeport was experiencing a shortage of law enforcement officers and a budget limitation on the hiring of new employees in any department with the city. We were assured that no such request would be forthcoming, he just wanted to see WV get the same tools to fight the drugs as other parts of the country. TDS as originally proposed was to be fully funded and staffed by DEA.

On behalf of the council and the city I wrote to our state's Congressional delegation requesting that they consider why with the drug problems we were experiencing in our communities the NDWV didn't have this TDS. Moreover, as an officer of the West Virginia Municipal League, I requested and obtained time on the agenda of the August League Annual Meeting and passed on the information we had learned and been given to other cities throughout the NDWV from Martinsburg to Wheeling and all points in between. The towns and cities of northern WV responded and many letters were sent to Washington DC and by the summer of 2016 a TDS for the NDWV had been funded by Congress. However, the promised staffing was incomplete and for the first time when the new TDS supervisor arrived in Clarksburg, we were told that they wanted manpower as well. In fact, they wanted to pick our best and brightest from our existing experience and trained officers to train as DEA TDS squad members.

At this point I will just say that the cynics will point to my personal past and discount that somehow, I'm not a supporter of the DEA. Nothing can be further from the truth, I think Drug Dealers should be arrested and punished. When the former Sheriff withdrew his support for the Harrison County Drug Task Force and the US Attorney asked for Bridgeport to double their manpower assigned to the TF, I and my fellow councilmembers without hesitation not only supplied an additional Full-time officer, but provided additional support in the form of office space, clerical help and greater attention from our Police Chief. All with the support and encouragement of the City Council. When I became Mayor almost three years ago, one of the first things I did was convene a group within the city to examine how as a community we could better address Drug addiction and its related issues. This group led to the city's support of Drug Free Clubs of America coming into Bridgeport HS, the placement of a drop box for prescription drugs inside city hall, when the Department of Justice stopped their Drug takeback program. Programs such as

needle exchanges and adding Narcan, the overdosed counteragent to police officers and fire department employees was instituted. The call for a TDS fit right in when it was identified as another weapon to attack the drugs. TDS is not however a cure by itself nor will it fix the problem.

What the uninformed and misinformed have been led to believe is that this is an issue of the \$40,000 which Bridgeport approved spending on a match with Clarksburg so that the Sheriff could supply the officer to TDS v \$60,000 for Bridgeport to assign one of our own officers. The truth is, DEA TDS has said they want as many as eight additional officers from the NDWV. Other than the commitment of a Harrison County Sherriff's Deputy by Sheriff Matheny, in almost a year no other state or municipal law enforcement agency in the Northern District of WV has assigned an officer to TDS. Why is that? Are we to believe that Wheeling and Martinsburg are waiting on Bridgeport to step up first? I think not. They are both so far away that it is geographically impossible for either to assign an employee to a TDS located in Clarksburg or otherwise impractical. But what about Morgantown and Fairmont? They are close enough that they could send an officer, people commute between Harrison County and Monongalia County every day. Why has DEA and Maxey made this a Bridgeport-Clarksburg issue? The city budget and staffing issues are much more complex than simply moving \$20,000 – 40,000 or even \$60,000 dollars. Our Councilman Maxey sat through the 17-18 Budget process and did not identify a single place where the city could cut or shift funds to hire an additional police officer for DEA DTS. Yet he still goes out and has told the County Commission that Bridgeport should follow his direction and hire another officer to assign.

The proposal which Bridgeport, Clarksburg and the Harrison County Sheriff constructed not only serves the need for additional officers to be assigned to TDS but it establishes a model by which all the other communities in NDWV could get on board. But even after I spent several meetings and hours talking with DEA TDS, they continue to reject an additional officer from the Sheriff's office because they want one from Bridgeport and Clarksburg. Don't get me wrong Bridgeport police officers are some of the best in the Sate as recognized two weeks ago when Bridgeport was ranked as one of the top ten safest cities in the State to live in! I think they are the best group in the State, they are the best equipped, best trained and caring group of police offers in the State. But TDS doesn't want the entry level officer, in fact they declined any officer we would newly hire just to be assigned to TDS and they have told me they don't want any more than one officer from the Sheriff. It is DEA TDS which is dragging their feet on this because they can't see any way to do this other than the way it has always been done.

What is the next step? The Harrison County Commission needs to approve the intergovernmental agreement which Clarksburg and Bridgeport have approved AND DEA needs to accept the manpower support, not the financial support being offered. Which brings me to my last point. Two weeks ago, when the Harrison County Commission had the agreement on their agenda for approval, Mr. Maxey went to the meeting and spoke against the proposal that Bridgeport had already approved. He is free to exercise his first amendment rights, but he should not and did not have the authority to speak on behalf of the City or this council. DEA TDS would have their additional officer had Mr. Maxey not spoken out of turn. In fact, no council action is required if the Chief of Police thinks such an assignment is the best use of the City law enforcement personnel.

It is claimed that the DEA and our minority councilperson know "the right way to staff a DEA tactical diversion squad". Well they have had over thirty years to get it right and we have a worse drug problem today then we have ever had. Maybe it time to try something a little different.