

OPINION: WHY LAW ENFORCEMENT GETS A BAD RAP

■ By Michael Ware

Law enforcement bashing. Sounds like fun doesn't it? Well it should, because as near as I can tell we're nearly all doing it. Conservation officers, deputies, state patrolmen, etc. — nobody is excluded.

Don't get me wrong. I'm an equal opportunity basher. If somebody has it coming no matter if it is a law enforcer or a prestigious doctor, I have no problem with giving it to them. If somebody touches a shot off between his feet at the range while not intending to, then a scorched backside will be the result from someone like me. If a cop oversteps his duties, he'll get the same treatment. In essence, I don't care who your employer is, we're all folks who put our pants on one leg at a time.

The subject of Law enforcement bashing has been bothering me for quite some time. I work closely with law enforcement as a firearms manufacturer and provider of top tier training. A fair portion of my clientele includes various department and agency people in both professional sales and personal capacities. The majority of these customers have a pretty good idea where I stand on things as simple as liberty, freedom, and even more specifically the 1st, 2nd, 4th, and 5th amendments. I call out a handful of the amendments since the right to free speech, right to keep and bear arms, prohibition of unreasonable searches and seizures, along with probable cause and due process, are basic tenants of how we're supposed to behave in my opinion.

In an age where accusation is nearly all it takes to appear, and in essence become, guilty in the court of public opinion the knife tends to cut both ways. We forget that all too often. When we see a person on the news, we nearly assume they are guilty of

what they're accused of. There is always a reaction to news stories; some reactions are slight and some are significant. However, the response when a cop is in the news is far worse. We tend to dogpile on a cop accused of a crime. Heck, we dogpile even if no crime appears to be present and the officer is simply in the news for questionable behavior or acts. Why is that? I think I have some insight you should consider.

First we have to be honest with ourselves. Who among us hasn't broken a law? I know I have. My lead foot was a much bigger problem when I was younger than now, but I still catch myself demonstrating a genuine need for the use of 'cruise control' in my truck. I sometimes wonder if because we know we've made mistakes and have simply broken the law that we shy away from law enforcement because of some small guilt. The human condition makes it easy for us to begin to then put distance between an officer of the law and ourselves. We also get a steady diet of negative views of the law enforcement community from film and television. Think of the last time a cop was portrayed as a completely righteous person on your hour long evening drama, or the last 'shoot em' up' movie you saw. You'll have to search pretty far back in your memory bank to provide a solid example unless you're parked on the couch with my wife and mother-in-law watching the Hallmark channel.

There are a couple of schools of thought that have to be discussed. Many think law enforcers are to be held to a higher standard.

I think that is true while on duty. Off duty, I tend to let that slide a bit. After all, these folks are human beings. They like to grill in the back yard just like you. They like to talk smack about the Kansas City Chiefs just like you. They like to blow their leaves onto the neighbor's lawn just to get a rise out of him, just like you do. OK, the last one is more of a 'me' thing than most of you, but you understand my parallel. A conservation officer has a wife and kids just like you do. So why the desire to grab the pitchforks and torches when they are a suspect or do something questionable or in a lot of matters when they don't do anything questionable other than simply doing their job?

I'll tell you why. We have a failed political class and crop of mustaches masquerading as leadership within law enforcement every place I turn.

Why are you sideways with the local DNR officer over the fact she'll nab you for carrying your defense pistol while you bow hunt? After all, is your life worth less on the way back from your tree stand in the dark than it is while you drive your pick up home? Heck no. Yet the DNR says they'll consider you a poacher if you do so. You haven't poached. You haven't fired a shot. You certainly haven't taken game illegally. Just the same, the Iowa DNR has made it clear they're prepared to arrest you for poaching for nothing more than using your permit to carry while you're engaged in archery hunting. The DNR has a pathetic policy in regards to this scenario. They

are assuming you're guilty of a crime that hasn't been committed and that is deplorable. Our reaction isn't much better. Instead of marching down to the Wallace Building in Des Moines and letting our feelings be known, we see a pickup truck cruise by with the "DNR" sticker on the door and mutter under our breath, provide hand gestures, or worse displays of bad behavior.

WE'RE PART OF THE PROBLEM TOO.

I watched the news explode weeks ago over a police officer that tried to entice a person into admitting they had smoked dope. According to the person stopped by the officer, they had not done so, recorded the stop, and provided it to the news for public flogging. While I can tell you I would have been really unhappy with being assumed a pothead, this officer was within his position to gather information from the suspect. The person stopped seemed to know his rights and left with no ill impact. Our reaction was typical. We got upset, wanted the officer fired, and applied universally the 'I hate cops' mantra to our Facebook pages. The response from the cop shop you're wondering? They apologized. I'm not sure where to start with how wrong all of that really is.

I am sick and tired of hearing "cops can do this" or "cops can't do that" that I could nearly puke coat hangers. If you actually knew the entirety of what a police officer could or couldn't do, you'd know more Iowa Code than our Supreme Court Justices do. Even they take days and weeks for findings, since they have to look it all up and cite it. Instead, you don't need to know what an officer can and can't do. All you have to know is what your rights are. A handful of them are all you need to keep in mind when facing an officer of the law. Knowing your rights, not breaking the law, and the ability to demonstrate responsibility isn't a long list of prerequisites to make it through each day.

Universally I have sought to be in harmony with law enforcement. Their goals and mine are aligned. While there are the occasional 'to protect and serve' spouts out there, most all officers know that isn't their mandate. While that was catchy in the mid 50's and necessary for the Los Angeles Police Department after years of corruption to propagandize and push onto the public, it isn't valid. The officers in this state swear an oath to uphold the laws of the state of Iowa and those of the United States. I mention this because I want them to enforce the laws. That's it. Nothing more, nothing less.

My wish that law enforcement entail only enforcement of the laws is a fool's paradise. Our political class, and I refer to



them as such since they have barely earned anything more respectful, has made so many laws, regulations, resolutions, ordinances, and rulings, you can't wake up and walk to the bathroom in your own home without risking a misdemeanor or worse. Referring to elected officials as the "political class" probably has made me guilty of something. Should my article not be present in next month's Iowa Sportsman magazine, I guess we'll know for sure.

We live in a state with various jurisdictions hell bent on looting us with "gotcha cams" as they have become known. Speed cameras are popular to the money hungry. The claim is, public safety is served with their installation. We know this is hogwash since the accidents associated with the same places the high dollar cameras are installed hasn't decreased on average. If the mission with cameras is that they create a deterrent for breaking the law, then why isn't it a moving violation when I am captured by a camera in the act of speeding? When an officer writes me a speeding ticket and I get too many or speed over a certain threshold, I can no longer drive. I can speed past a traffic camera every day all day long, and I only have to pony up a fee. I don't risk losing my driver's license. So we know, with no shred of doubt, the gotcha cams are about revenue generation and not about us. Ask who is pushing this agenda and it falls squarely on the law enforcement leadership and the political class I referred to. It is easier on their budgets. Provided there is a budget short fall, it is then popular to tell you all that services like fire and rescue along with police cruisers and staff will have to be cut. This is designed to scare you all. It happens to work with great success by the way. You should also take note who the 'who' is that gets cut when a budget is rarely trimmed. I'll give you a hint. It isn't the leadership or the

political class that lose their jobs. It is the guy standing out in the rain directing traffic as the drunks leave the stadiums and concerts that get the axe.

Law enforcement bashing. Now popular and often done, but rarely earned as I see it. Sure there are probably some bad eggs amongst the population, but as the old saying goes "don't let the actions of a few dictate your image of the whole." Instead of chastising an entire group of people as universally bad, why don't we know our rights, apply them, and modify the political class? If you were to learn that the Sheriff and Deputies Association registers 'opposed' a bill that would amend our state constitution to include the Right to Keep and Bear Arms put forth by the IFC and NRA. Do you really believe all the rank and file cops out there would be in opposition to it? Or is it more likely this is some big city sheriff pushed this action hoping it would give him some misguided political points come election time? Do you really believe every DNR officer was looking forward to pestering you about your permit to carry while you went hunting or did some gold windowed office cubicle hack in a suit send out an 'all users' email telling them to bust you?

If a conservation officer screws up or cop messes up, fine, toss the book at them. But short of that, keep in mind exactly who created the distrust in our law enforcement. The discord we see today is the result of a failed group of politicians and poor application of policy by the leadership. The gaping chasm a series of irresponsible acts has grown between the public and the civil servants in law enforcement can squarely be laid on the elected officials and a handful of so called leaders. If you want serious change, then you're going to have to give the folks behind a steering wheel for a living a break and double down on others to get some real relief. 🙏

