



DAVE PARISOT: County commissioner: I didn't see Gaetz do any 'heavy lifting'

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By DAVE PARISOT

This guest column is in response to your May 12 article, "A bumpy legislative session: Don and Matt Gaetz took heat from local officials over some of their proposals."

According to the article, Rep. Matt Gaetz "said no one from the county contacted him before the committee meeting" on pretrial services. I want to shed some sunshine on that.

I met with Rep. Gaetz in his legislative office March 23. That was the day after I testified, at the request of Sen. Greg Evers, against the Senate version of the pretrial release bill (SB 372). During that meeting, I gave Rep. Gaetz a copy of the fact sheet on the successes of the pretrial release program in Okaloosa County, specifically highlighting the millions of tax dollars the program has saved county taxpayers and the unanimous position of the Okaloosa Board of County Commissioners.

Rep. Gaetz asked me who was the sponsor of the House version of the pretrial release bill (HB 1379). When I told him it was Rep. Chris Dorworth, Rep. Gaetz informed me he would not vote against HB 1379 because the bill was sponsored by Dorworth, who apparently has been selected as a future "designated" speaker of the Florida House.

To quote Rep. Gaetz: "I can't vote against that bill. Rep. Dorworth is my future speaker."

Further, on March 28, I was present to testify again to Sen. Evers' committee, and also testified March 29 to the House Criminal Justice Subcommittee, informing this committee of the tremendous saving of tax dollars that pretrial release programs have meant for county taxpayers.

Now, if Rep. Gaetz had changed his mind on this bill, he certainly did not contact me prior to my testimony on April 21 to the House Judiciary Committee, of which Rep. Gaetz is a member. And yes, I gave him my card during my March 23 visit. This card has my office, cell and home phone numbers as well as two e-mail addresses on it.

Communication works both ways.

Your article also quotes Rep. Gaetz as saying, "I did a lot of heavy lifting, and to have Okaloosa County show up and trash a bill without consulting me was incredibly embarrassing to me and could have undermined my efforts."

To this day, I am not aware of what "heavy lifting" Rep. Gaetz did on HB 1379 to benefit his district in Okaloosa and Santa Rosa counties. In fact, during his comments to his fellow Judiciary Committee members, he said he was having serious thoughts of offering an amendment on the House floor that would increase the costs to Okaloosa County.

I am also quite certain that Rep. Gaetz had been told I would be testifying to the House Judiciary Committee against HB 1379 on April 21.

Your article quotes Rep. Gaetz as saying: "I don't represent local government. I represent the taxpayer." Regarding the legislation on pretrial release in this just-completed session, his votes in support of HB 1379 were representing the special-interest bail bondsman industry — NOT the taxpayers.

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Dave Parisot is an Okaloosa County commissioner representing District 2.

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