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GUEST COLUMN » Brigitte Joyce

Georgia gun bill is dangerous

If you're like me, you've flown out of Atlanta's Hartsfield-Jackson Airport.

Georgia has played host to the world's busiest passenger airport for 15 straight years. With planned improvements, we are expected to host some 13 million people from around the country and the world in 2015 alone. So I'm flummoxed that the Georgia state legislature is expected to send a bill to Gov. Nathan Deal to allow loaded guns, even high-powered assault rifles, into airports — including Hartsfield-Jackson.

Hartsfield-Jackson is the state's largest employer, with some 58,000 employees. Airlines, ground transportation, concessionaires, security, the federal workers, city personnel and airport employees show southern hospitality to the 250,000 people a day who arrive and depart — keeping them coming back, keeping jobs and investment in Georgia.

I know a thing or two about guns, and I know something about security.

Serving in the U.S. Army for 24 years, I was a supply sergeant and received extensive weapons training for deployments. I enlisted during the Cold War, was deployed to the first Gulf War and served beyond the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. I'm also a South Georgia native who hunts and owns a gun for personal protection. I've served to defend the rights I exercise on a daily basis.

My experience, my values, and a large amount of common-sense tell me that this "guns everywhere" Georgia bill is a bad idea.

In addition to allowing people to roam unsecured airport areas with guns and even bring them into TSA security lines without consequence, it would allow K-12 teachers, administrators, staff or anyone authorized by a local school board to carry firearms anywhere on school grounds. It would decriminalize campus carry. It would allow people to conceal carry in houses of worship and in bars, unless the organization specifically opted out. And it would allow guns in state and local government buildings, libraries, public housing, and City Council meetings.

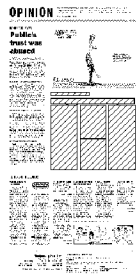
Even more dangerous is who would be allowed to bring guns into airports and schools. The legislation would actually allow people who have been convicted of threatening someone else with a gun to get a carry permit. I was raised around values of responsible gun ownership, but this bill puts guns in the hands of the most dangerous people - and invites them into the most sensitive places in our communities.

Meanwhile, the gun lobby and the state legislature continue to support allowing many gun sales to occur without background checks, so that anybody wanting to buy a gun — be they a criminal, domestic abuser or dangerously mentally ill — can easily get a firearm. I believe that poses an unnecessary and avoidable danger.

As service members, each of us had to pass a background check to carry our weapons, and we were committed to and trained on their safe, responsible use. Now we need to stand up and oppose the gun lobby and send a clear signal that we stand with our country in doing what we can to protect our rights and our families by keeping guns out of the hands of those who would do us harm and away from the most sensitive places

I urge Georgia lawmakers to keep our residents and travelers to our state safe from gun violence. The Georgia motto is Wisdom, Justice, Moderation. Let's hold true to such values.

Brigitte Joyce is a retired Army sergeant major.



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