Video of Testy Confrontation Between Pooler PD and Independent Journalist Goes Viral

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WJCL 22 digs deeper into a viral video of a testy confrontation between an independent video journalist and the Pooler, Georgia Police Department. Sean-Paul Reyes told WJCL 22 News he wanted to see how Pooler police would react to him with a camera wanting to file an open records request. In a letter to WJCL, the Pooler City Attorney called the whole incident a tempest in a teapot designed by Reyes to make money. Reyes posted sections of the videotaped incident on his YouTube page called 'Long Island Audit'.

"Let me see your driver's license. Let me see your ID," a Pooler police sergeant on the video said to Reyes who was standing in an employee parking lot.

Reyes responds, "I don't have a legal obligation to give you an ID, sir."

In the video, you can see Pooler police Chief Ashley Brown approach Reyes. The two men have a back and forth caught on video. Chief Brown tells Reyes, "I am the chief of police." Reyes responds, "Can I get your name?" Chief Brown said, "You can look it up on the internet if you are that smart." Reyes said, "Where is the professionalism? Why do I have to look it up on the internet?"? Chief Brown said, "What is your name?"

WJCL 22 News asked REYES why he picked this Savannah suburb?

"I was in Savannah randomly. I like to travel so I chose Pooler because someone reached out and asked me to, a Pooler resident," Reyes said.

According to Reyes, he had no problem filing an open records request with the Pooler clerk's office. But the interaction with the police was different based on the short clips Reyes had with the officers that he posted on social media. For example, Reyes shows himself standing, camera rolling in the employee parking lot as the police approach him. In one of the video clips, a sergeant approaches Reyes, and says, "You're not an employee and you're in the employee parking lot and you are making employees feel uncomfortable, the female employees."

In that same short video clip, you can hear Reyes question the officer.

"Do you suspect me of committing a crime?" Reyes asked. The sergeant responded, "Do you have your ID on you?"

In a Zoom interview, WJCL asked Reyes why he didn't tell the officer who he was, give him identification and explain the purpose of his video audit?

"Yes, but my only response to that would be I don't announce myself as doing a video audit, a first amendment audit because that would defeat the purpose," Reyes said.

WJCL looked at Reyes' Long Island Audit YouTube page and discovered Reyes has done 15 such video audits of different police departments and law enforcement agencies since May of last year. The YouTube page has more than 183,000 subscribers. The video involving Pooler police has gone viral. It generated more than 1,500 comments on the Pooler Police Department Facebook page. Some of the comments were critical of how the department handled the situation. Others were supportive.

WJCL wanted to know if the video is a fair representation of what happened that day and how Pooler police interact with the public on a daily basis. We went to the Pooler Police Department to ask Chief Brown. A police department employee told us Chief Brown was not in his office. Pooler City Attorney Steven E. Scheer sent WJCL a letter stating that "the City of Pooler did nothing wrong … this tempest in a teapot is designed to make money for the so-called 'audit' poster."

Reyes told us he does make money from his YouTube page.

"Of course, I receive ad revenue. I receive revenue for what I do. The police department gets paid for what they do," Reyes said.

In the end, Reyes was able to file an open records request and a complaint against Chief Brown.

"I disagree with how they reacted. I am sure there are people who disagree with what I do. And how I reacted," Reyes said. According to his website, Reyes said he exercises the first amendment in a respectful manner. Reyes said he is threatening to file a federal lawsuit against the Pooler Police Department.