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Demonstrators bring policing issues to Cleveland for Republican National Convention

Highlights:

Policing one of many issues demonstrated by protesters

CopBlock organization encourages filming of police

Member detained after writing on police barrier

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Special to the Sun Herald

CLEVELAND

“Badges don’t grant extra rights.”

Those are the words a Las Vegas man said he was planning on writing on a police barrier at the corner of Ontario and Prospect streets late Monday morning on the first day of the 2016 Republican National Convention.

Ademo Freeman managed to get only one letter scripted in blue chalk before Cleveland police stopped him. He was wearing a black T-shirt with the words “CopBlock.org” written across the front. The police put Freeman in the back of a police car.

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After police searched through Freeman’s backpack, they confiscated his blue and red chalk, he said, and released him.

Freeman is a member of CopBlock, an organization that encourages filming of police, said bystander and longtime group member Kelly Patterson.

In the wake of violence across the country following police shootings — and the assassinations of police officers in Dallas and Baton Rouge — dozens of protest groups and hundreds of demonstrators have converged on Cleveland to make statements during the Republican National Convention. Police officers by the thousands from across the country patrol the city in hopes of keeping the streets calm.

In Freeman, they found a protester brandishing chalk, not a weapon.

Patterson, also from Las Vegas, said he's known Freeman for a while through CopBlock, and he said the organization has been trying to warn people that police need to be held accountable for their actions.

The built-up tensions over the years combined with the political atmosphere throughout the United States creates an environment where the recent police shootings should not come as a surprise to anyone, said Patterson.

“I think this is something we've been warning police about for a decade,” Patterson said. “CopBlock has been telling them that accountability is good for [police] too, since the bad apples are making it bad for the good cops.”

Nancy Pusateri, manager of Hyde Park Prime Steakhouse, a downtown eatery, said she came out of the restaurant when she heard the commotion involving Freeman.

Born and raised in Cleveland, Pusateri said that even though three officers were killed in Baton Rouge on Sunday, she doesn't see how a police shooting could happen at the convention.

Pusateri said security in Cleveland has been tight for months in anticipation of the convention, with many restaurants even changing their procedures as added protection.

“It's not that I don't feel safe,” she said. “It's just that no one can prepare you for this huge amount of political people.”

Pusateri said she has been pleased with the way everything has been working out so far. She offered praise for the scores of police officers outside.

“Everyone is very professional and very polite,” she said. “The officers don’t complain, and they are the ones putting their lives in danger on a daily basis.”