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Fresh Political Pickins From The Peach State

Tom Owens, A Man Amok

October 6, 2014 9:00 am

by [George Chidi](#) · [9 comments](#)

I tried to ask Owens about all of this.

I spoke to him briefly, at a community event in Tucker in September. I asked him about the spitting incident. His demeanor – campaign-mode jocularly – shut down as soon as I brought it up. Rather than deny it, he simply said “I have no recollection of that event.”

I replied that it’s the sort of thing one would remember doing, or not doing. Same answer. I asked about the police reports of harassment. He just sort of shook his head.

Later, after hearing him talk about integrity and transparency after the forum, I approached him again outside. I had questions about his ongoing lawsuit against the mosque. A man who identified himself as his campaign manager demanded to know if I was a Muslim. I said that it wouldn’t matter if I were, but that I did not happen to be.

I asked Owens if he’s a Sandy Hook “truther,” if he believes the conventionally-held view of events as reported. Owens first response was to say that there’s only one person who knows, “the guy who did it.” I found that response cryptic.

As I began asking him about the conditions of his separation from service, he simply

told me that it was honorable, and then left without continuing the conversation. Two people with cameras captured the exchange. I expect to see it online, sooner or later.

Before publishing this, I called him, hoping to win further clarification about his views on immigration and the Second Amendment. Owens is aligned with the anti-immigration movement, but would be representing one of the most immigrant-heavy commission districts in the state.

He said he was campaigning and too busy to talk to me, then hung up. I texted him my email address and questions about his financial stake in promoting the failure of the Doraville mosque, and about his no contest plea to stalking. I am keenly interested in whether he's willing to publicly deny paternity of Nancy Wells' daughter.

Alas, we know not.

Before an event in Dunwoody on October 5, I made one last effort to try to speak to him. The same unnamed "campaign manager" said that there would be no interview — that I had burned my bridges the first time. Owens only said to me that he wished for me not to speak to him or attempt to contact him, and then walked away, keeping his distance. During the forum, Owens would look up from time to time as he sat on the panel, see me looking at him, then look down awkwardly.

I'll give him this: the aw-shucks, I-don't-drink-Starbucks schtick has appeal as an applause line. He seems to honestly believe that filing ethics complaints containing little more than a recounting of the AJC's published investigations count for something. And he's very tall. He's got that going for him. Which is nice.

He made a point of asking during the forum "how many people on this panel here have read the budget? I've read the budget for the last five years, and we're going to be like Detroit if we don't get a handle on this budget." Bear in mind: he asked this of a panel containing a former Alston-Bird attorney who helped plan Brookhaven's incorporation efforts; Denese, an uber-wonky retired engineer, and Jester, who was the principal anti-waste advocate on the school board.

Try to ignore the fact that the DeKalb budget is actually in surplus right now and [boosted its financial reserves for the first time since the recession began](#).

The *very next question* asked panelists for their understanding of the DeKalb County budget with regards to the general fund. Which departments have the largest operating

fund, and which departments would you move toward privatization?

“That’s a trick question there, but I’ll try to answer it,” he said. “There’s a lot to say. There’s a lot going on in DeKalb County and we don’t know about it, through this corruption there’s a lot of money and lot of things that people don’t know, and, ah, ah, just ah ... there’s the school system and the money there, and the budget is very critical. The cities are good. They need to manage their money and budget it and, ah, privatization is good and there’s nothing wrong with that. But my main concern is what do the citizens get and what benefits the citizens and the tax payers and that’s what’s important. I’m (an inaudible word, perhaps vetting) for senior citizens services, to look at it in an honest way and not try to do back door deals to screw everybody.”

[That’s verbatim](#). Word salad. This, less than one minute after calling out an engineer, a lawyer and an accountant for their lack of policy detail.

After the meeting, I had my first run-in with Joe Newton.

Owens has been aligned for years with Newton, who might be fairly described as an anti-immigration radical who describes refugees as “[lifetime welfare beneficiaries](#).” (This link will damage your faith in humanity. You’ve been warned.) Newton and Owens have repeatedly made spectacles of themselves in public meetings around Doraville and north DeKalb, alienating much of the Republican delegation with theatrical protests complaining about everything from refugee intake in Clarkston to the mosque behind Owens’ house.

Newton refused to identify himself to me in Dunwoody. Instead, he physically blocked me from approaching Owens, shouting over me, calling me a liar as I tried to ask about Hailey Wells. I wanted to know if he would, at the very least, either acknowledge or disavow her claim to be his daughter. I tried to ask if he had completed the mental health counseling in the sentencing report from Forsyth. I wanted to know why there’s a police report of him apparently confessing to defiling the door of a Christian thrift shop charity near his home. I would have liked to ask why he didn’t deploy with his unit to Afghanistan, and why a man who earned a criminal justice degree in 1980 from Georgia State does not appear to have ever applied for Georgia POST certification to work as a police officer here, and has worked instead as a landscaper.

But Owens turned his back and walked away, with Newton calling me a liar and a fool and a Muslim and the unnamed campaign manager questioning my military

service record.

↔

Tom Owens is what happens when no one gives a damn about local government.

How often would one have to hear a six-foot-three veteran scream “You know I’m talking to you!” or “I know you don’t you @#\$ @#\$@ LIBERAL!” inches from your face — as Susan Fraysee noted in her account of her interactions with Owens — to decide that you might have better things to do than attend comprehensive planning reviews by the city?

We are inundated with this kind of communication in politics here. It infects the comment boards of AJC.com and the coffee house conversations in Decatur. It leads to adverse selection. Good people simply do not want to stand accused of being a Nazi sympathizer for objecting to a zoning decision. Policy has become a screaming match driven by crisis, made only by the people willing to withstand catcalling.

Increasingly, it’s being abandoned to the Owenses of the world.

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gcp [October 6, 2014 at 10:42 am](#)

Electing candidates with personal problems usually results in elected politicians with problems.

Examples: Sherry Barnes Sutton domestic and financial issues, Stan Watson involved in a bizarre incident a couple years ago at a Glenwood bar where he accused a female of stealing his wallet, bankruptcy of the current interim CEO and of course Elaine Boyer and her crimes.

Conclusion: If you can’t run your own life you should not be in public office.

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[George Chidi](#) [October 6, 2014 at 10:48 am](#)

These are not normal-person personal problems.

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[Jon Lester](#) [October 6, 2014 at 11:20 am](#)

You've done great work here, George.

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[gcp](#) [October 6, 2014 at 11:37 am](#)

And these issues with the current commissioners should be ignored?

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[Chet Martin](#) [October 6, 2014 at 11:35 am](#)

Comments from page 2- where can I pre-order the book?

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[tomowensfordekalb](#) [October 6, 2014 at 12:46 pm](#)

“Although the author of this article has misrepresented the truth about me personally, my military service and about my intentions behind my pursuing the end of corruption and unlawfulness in DeKalb, he is correct that “...too many voters have abandoned DeKalb politics to the mendacious and the mad. The AJC and other media outlets have no spare capacity to dive into a local race. A superficially-observed local election leaves Owens with a puncher’s chance in

a fight, since a five-way race could go to a thinly-attended December runoff.”

So, I want to personally encourage everyone to VOTE on November 4th. Take a look at my website <http://www.tomowensfordekalb.com> and if you have questions, please message me and I will be happy to provide truthful information about my background and intentions from the source.”

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objective [October 6, 2014 at 1:26 pm](#)

if you feel misrepresented, you have the opportunity to address the substance of the problems raised right here.

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objective [October 6, 2014 at 1:24 pm](#)

nice work, george.

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DAinGA [October 6, 2014 at 2:37 pm](#)

Really great piece. And it is also very true that these people drive out the sane and thoughtful from local politics and yet when they get in, they are extremely thin skinned about anything. And this happens around the metro area. Look at Morrow right now, look at East Point a few years ago with their Mayor, the current Snellville Mayor, the former Mayor of Stockbridge. Zealots NEVER make good leaders.

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