

 [Print This Article](#)

Posted on Tue, Apr. 13, 2010

Stanislaus County sheriff signs pledge to make gun permits easier

By Garth Stapley

gstapley@modbee.com

last updated: April 13, 2010 07:12:41 AM

People with a clean record who want to carry a gun will have a much better chance at snagging a concealed weapon permit, Sheriff Adam Christianson said Monday, drawing thunderous applause from firearms advocates.

The stunning change in policy comes as Christianson prepares to lay off dozens of deputies because of budget cuts. He has released 300 inmates to comply with new state rules.

The sheriff, who is running for re-election on the June 8 ballot, stood grim-faced during a 12-minute introduction at Monday's public meeting of the Madison Society, whose leaders have criticized Christianson for being stingy with gun permits. He had told them -- and The Bee as recently as two weeks ago -- that he would not sign a pledge accepting self-protection as "good cause" for licensing.

Given the stage Monday, Christianson shocked a standing-room-only audience of more than 100 by immediately signing the pledge with a flourish.

"I'm not going to infringe upon your right to protect yourselves," the sheriff said. "You are more likely to get a gun permit when you apply for one."

The pledge reads, in part: "As sheriff, self-protection shall always constitute good cause for the issuance of a permit to carry a concealed wea-pon as that term is defined in (the) California Penal Code."

During a question-answer session, many audience members said Christianson had denied their applications. But they seemed reluctant to grill a sheriff who had just signed the pledge.

Christianson encouraged many to reapply, providing his personal phone number to several former rejects.

They included Ollie Usher, who said he had a permit for five years before being turned down, and Mark Wallace, who was among several Turlock residents who said they were angry about their police chief's conservative approach to gun permits. Of seven issued by that department, two are held by city councilmen.

People in the audience began snickering when it became apparent that many asking questions Monday were from Turlock. Christianson asked those from that city to raise their hands, and he laughed with the audience when a few dozen shot up.

The sheriff continued playing to the crowd, telling stories about assault rifles on open display in Montana stores, where he grew up and took his family on vacation last year.

A farmer said he often irrigates fields in the early morning. The sheriff brought down the house when he responded, "Straight up; I give all ag (people) a gun permit because I know you guys are carrying a gun anyway."

He added, "I'm laying off deputies, and we've got more bad guys; you won't have a problem."

The sheriff said 582 people throughout Stanislaus County hold two-year permits. He personally approved all after background checks by staff members.

When Wayne Elam of Hickman asked about rising application fees, the sheriff pointed to a public hearing scheduled for April 27. Christianson will ask county supervisors to increase the charge from \$13 to \$115, which is about half the cost to process applications, he said.



ALISON YIN/ayin@modbee.com Stanislaus County Sheriff Adam Christianson addresses the Madison Society and community members at a public meeting regarding concealed gun permits in Modesto, Calif., Monday, Apr. 12, 2010. - Modesto Bee - Alison Yin

Christianson must reduce his department's yearly budget of about \$80 million by 10 percent, or about \$8 million. He is expected to reveal layoff intentions along with the county's 26 other departments, also on April 27.

Christianson's challenger, Turlock police Capt. Rob Jackson, declined to sign the Madison Society's pledge when he addressed the group last month.

The Madison Society, a Modesto-based group known nationally for pushing pro-gun litigation, was instrumental in a 2008 U.S. Supreme Court ruling reversing a gun ban in Washington, D.C.

For an April 4 Bee story, Christianson had said the ruling "has nothing to do with California," where loaded firearms are legal in homes and businesses. Carrying concealed weapons in public is a different matter, the sheriff said at the time, and should remain up to the local law enforcement executive charged with judging good cause and good moral character.

Christianson on Monday warned people to come clean on applications, noting it's a felony to submit false or fraudulent information.

After the meeting, many people in the audience said they were thrilled with the news.

"He's right -- there are not enough deputies out there," said Bob Winston, a Modesto attorney. "What does law enforcement do? They come after the fact and try to clean up the mess, which doesn't help the poor victim lying in a pool of blood. You're on your own."

Bee staff writer Garth Stapley can be reached at gstapley@modbee.com or 578-2390.

This article is protected by copyright and should not be printed or distributed for anything except personal use.
Copyright © 2013, The Modesto Bee, 1325 H St., Modesto, CA 95354
Phone: (209) 578-2000.