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Man arrested after shouting ‘womp, womp’ and pulling a gun on immigration protesters

by [Avi Selk](#) July 1 at 3:48 PM [✉Email the author](#)

The gathering at a park gazebo in Huntsville, Ala., was by no means the largest of Saturday’s nationwide protests against President Trump’s “zero tolerance” border policies, though it was memorable for other reasons. It began around noon, as an Episcopal priest delivered a prayer to about 100 protesters gathered around the gazebo and a man marched back and forth in front of her, shouting “womp, womp!”

“Holy and ever-loving God . . .” said the priest, Kerry Holder-Joffrion.

“Womp, womp!” [said the man](#).

“We pray for the children of this nation and all nations . . .”

“WOMP, WOMP!”

The man was parroting former Trump campaign manager Corey Lewandowski, who had [uttered the same sound](#) on Fox News several days earlier during a discussion about migrant children being seized from their parents at the border. Lewandowski’s sarcastic “womp, womp” revolted many people — but also apparently inspired a certain segment of Trump’s supporters, as the people at Big Spring Park were now discovering.

“We offer your love to all of our children . . .” Holder-Joffrion continued.

“Womp, womp!”

Families Belong Together-Huntsville, AL 6-30-18 ("Womp Womp" Counter-protester disruption)



This was not the man’s only message. He held a sign above his head on which was written “ICE ICE Baby,” and he occasionally shout-sang the notes of a [hip-hop song](#) by the same name over the prayer.

The man had a handgun tucked in his cargo pants, according to police.

After he had disrupted the first half of Holder-Joffrion’s prayer, a few protesters began drifting away from the audience to confront the man. A woman paced backward in front of him, holding her own sign in his face as he marched forward — “Super Callous Racist Fascist Sexist Braggadocious.”

“Where are your ancestors from?” someone asked the man.

“Alabama!” he answered.

Holder-Joffrion felt her stomach tighten but made up her mind to finish the prayer.

“I didn’t open my eyes, so that I could stay focused,” she told The Washington Post. “My voice gained volume as it became more chaotic.”

In fact, she nearly shouted her remaining verses, cheered on by the crowd while the man continued to shout in the background.

“We ask that you give us the strength in the face of the opposition not to hate, but to love,” Holder-Joffrion said, the lines coming to her in the moment. “Prayer is stronger than hatred!”

It was around this point that the gun came out.

A Huntsville police spokesman said the man — identified as 34-year-old Shane Ryan Sealy — pushed one of the protesters, who pushed him back and knocked him to the ground, at which point Sealy allegedly produced the weapon.

Holder-Joffrion still had her eyes closed, and she said her husband, Democratic [congressional candidate](#) Peter Joffrion, didn’t see a scuffle — just a protester telling Sealy to “leave, leave, leave, leave.”

In any case, the weapon came out of the waistband.

“Gun, gun, gun, gun!” someone shouted in [video published by WAFF 48](#) — just as Holder-Joffrion was praying for the nation’s strength.

Panicked shouts drowned her out, and the camera turned from the priest to Sealy, about 15 feet from the gazebo, brandishing what appeared to be a pistol at the crowd.

Most people dropped. “I got down on my face on the other side of the gazebo right here and just cried, I was so in shock,” rally organizer [Ava Caldwell](#) told [WBTB](#).

But several protesters remained upright. One man pointed directly at Sealy, shouting warnings that the man was armed.

Holder-Joffrion said she remained standing under the gazebo, eyes still shut in concentration, determined to finish her prayer no matter what happened.

The video shows Sealy putting the gun back in his waistband and backing away from the crowd, then turning around and walking quickly in the opposite direction.

Of the few protesters who followed him, most did so with obvious caution — one man still holding his “Brown People Are Still People” sign as he watched Sealy go.

But a white-haired man nearly sprinted in pursuit, tossing his cap to the ground as he chased Sealy toward a tree line.

Sealy didn’t make it that far. A police cruiser soon rolled across the grass to meet him, and then a second car approached from his left.

He put his hands up, still holding his “ICE ICE Baby” sign. A former high school teacher, [according to AL.com](#), he was initially arrested for possessing a gun within 1,000 feet of a protest. But he would later be booked into jail on misdemeanor charges of menacing and reckless endangerment.

Holder-Joffrion had her eyes closed through most of the action. She said she remained under the gazebo, continuing her prayer through to “Amen.”

When she finally opened her eyes, she looked across the park and saw about half a dozen police officers standing over Sealy.

“I realized they’d been among us in the crowd all along,” she said.

All around her, people were shaking, crying and getting up from the ground. A young girl who had been scheduled to speak later in the rally was too traumatized to get the words out, Holder-Joffrion said.

Still, [the protest went on](#). Holder-Joffrion said a pastor delivered a second prayer immediately after hers — this one in Spanish.

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stephencleghorn 6 hours ago

Some brave people there, especially the guy in the white shirt, going after the guy with a gun. As a graduate of Huntsville High School, and son of a man born there, I was so pleased to see these folks not only out to keep immigrant families together, but showing the courage to confront a man who tried to intimidate them with a gun. Wow.

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