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ALERT TOP STORY TOPICAL

REPUBLICAN NATIONAL CONVENTION

Law enforcement came from all over the country for the RNC and stayed in college dorms

JENNA WANG For the State Journal

Jul 18, 2024

Amid the sea of people decked out in festive red and white at the Republican National Convention Fest, the groups of heavily armed law enforcement officers stand out.

About 4,500 law enforcement officers from 24 states and the District of Columbia — including 44 Wisconsin agencies plus federal agencies — are safeguarding the convention’s 50,000 attendees.

In addition to Secret Service officers, there are bicycle patrol units gliding in pelotons around street corners. There are officers and state troopers lining the walled-off streets, surveying every attendee as they walk back and forth.

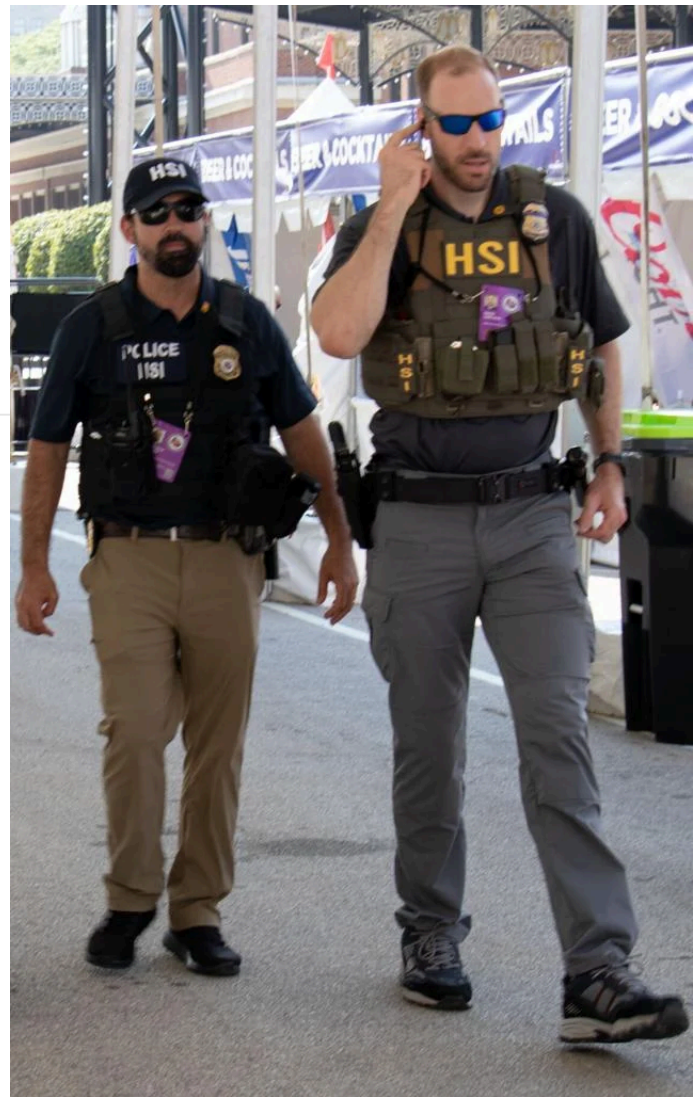
“They’ve been graciously helping us out,” one Milwaukee Police Department officer said as he strolled the Convention Fest with two colleagues. “These guys have been fantastic.”

The out-of-town police sparked controversy when five officers from Columbus, Ohio, shot and killed a man wielding two knives in a neighborhood about a mile from the convention. Residents in that area and the dead man’s family questioned why police from another state were in town and involved in an incident outside the convention. About 100 people attended a vigil and march at the shooting site Tuesday. Milwaukee

Police Chief Jeffrey Norman defended the officers, saying they were bicycle officers within their assigned zone near the convention and that somebody's life was in immediate danger.

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Federal law enforcement patrols at the Republican National Convention. About 4,500 officers, many from out of town, are working at the event in Milwaukee.

NOAH POSER, FOR THE STATE JOURNAL



Officers wait outside the Commons residence hall at Marquette University.

JENNA WANG, FOR THE STATE JOURNAL

Many of the thousands of out-of-town officers are staying at local universities.

Officers were housed at colleges during the 2016 RNC in Cleveland, provoking outrage from hundreds of students and faculty at Case Western University and leading the university to shut down campus activities. In Wisconsin, though, they have stayed on the campuses without incident.

A half-hour drive from Fiserv Forum, a Missouri officer and a Nebraska state trooper live on the campus of Concordia University Wisconsin in Mequon. Both have roommates — officers are housed as many as three to a room — and also share bathrooms and a dining hall.

“It’s just like being in the academy again,” where trainees did everything together, said the Nebraska trooper. Both the officer and the trooper declined to give their names because they were not authorized to speak to the media.

Schools opt in

Concordia is one of four institutions the Milwaukee Police Department has contracted to house visiting officers. The others are Wisconsin Lutheran College, UW-Whitewater and Carroll University. Federal agencies have been responsible for finding their own accommodations, according to Milwaukee police.

The funding comes from a Department of Justice security grant of \$75 million. Since 2004, host cities of nominating conventions have typically received \$50 million. However, Wisconsin’s congressional delegation asked for an additional \$25 million this year, citing increased costs.

Milwaukee city spokesperson Jeff Fleming hopes the costs will translate into economic benefits for the local colleges that the MPD has contracted.

“We appreciate the willingness of institutions to make space available, and we’re glad there is an opportunity for them to earn some additional money,” Fleming said in a statement.

When asked about some of the institutions being outside of Milwaukee, Fleming replied that the request for proposals “included local colleges. They chose not to respond.”

UW-Madison and UW-Milwaukee were asked to provide housing, but the RNC withdrew those requests.

At Marquette

The day before the convention’s start, outside the Commons residence hall on Marquette University’s campus, a throng of officers hopped off their bikes. They mingled and chatted amid the heat and a row of white government-plated cars along

the street.

Some students said there wasn't communication that the officers would be staying at the university and weren't happy about it.

University spokesperson Lynn Griffith confirmed in a statement that residence halls are at capacity for the convention, mainly housing law enforcement and media, while some space is reserved for students in summer bridge programs and student-athletes. All proceeds from campus rentals will fund student scholarships, she said.

As a summer crew leader living on campus, Marquette incoming senior Ashley White said she has seen law enforcement in dorms all across campus, as well as surrounding streets and stores. The biomedical sciences major said that she felt fine with their presence on campus.

Elliot Sgrignuoli, the incoming president of the Marquette College Republicans and the son of two police officers, said law enforcement on campus would be a good thing.

"There's open space — may as well the school is getting a little money for having them," the political science major said. "I mean, no one's there right now really, so I just feel like it's practical."

Incoming UW-Whitewater junior and College Democrats communications director Evelyn Schmidt said that she didn't know about law enforcement housing on campus. Yet, after hearing from students and community leaders, she said she's OK with the decision as long as there is "equal opportunity."

"I want to make sure that the university is getting fairly compensated," she said. "I also think it's really important to have people feel safe for the RNC and make sure that Milwaukee police are supported."

"If Whitewater can do our part," she said, "I'm totally cool with that."
