

By-Lined Article

MORE THOUGHTS FROM THE G-20: THE COMMUTE

By Thomas R. Schmuhl

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As lawyers, we sometimes undertake unusual assignments for clients. However, my unusual assignment for today was not on behalf of a client.

Instead it was to get from a hotel near the Pittsburgh Airport to the Duane Morris office on the 50th floor of 600 Grant St. in Pittsburgh. Normally, this would be a simple task of taking a cab or car and driving to the heart of the city's famous Golden Triangle and riding an elevator to the 50th floor. In light of the traffic restrictions prevailing today and the somewhat dire sounding warnings coming from various national and local media about anarchical protestors, I made the sensible decision to drive several miles to the terminus of a light rail line into the city.

When I left my hotel I had all the typical thoughts that enter the mind of an experienced international corporate lawyer heading to an office tower in a major city. Can I still run fast enough to evade an angry protestor concerned about the status of unknown species of flora and fauna on the steppes of Central Asia? Will my dry cleaner be able to effectively remove the paint or other noxious liquid that will probably be thrown at me as I walk past an angry crowd? Will the police confuse me with someone who is seeking to overthrow the government simply because the real culprit also wears glasses and, like me, does not have an overabundance of hair? Why did I ever return my gas mask to the supply sergeant when I left the Army?

As is usually the case when we get "psyched up" about a meeting or a trip, the reality turns out to be quite different from what we imagined.

The tram ride through the suburbs where the leaves have just begun to take on their autumnal colors, a week or two before the same thing will happen in Philadelphia, was quiet and efficient. The streets were filled with police and troops and they outnumbered the small number of residents and visitors who were quietly standing around with cameras waiting to take a snapshot of a passing president or prime minister. Even Pittsburgh's famous rivers were filled with police boats with flashing lights.

The only loud noises were coming from the sirens of motorcades. (Obviously the sirens are needed as an extra precaution in case someone inexplicably fails to notice the enormous number of flashing lights on the police motorcycles that precede the official cars of the motorcade.) In fact, there are so many police motorcycles here that I have almost concluded that the real purpose of this event is to provide a special subsidy to Harley Davidson.

The streets are also filled with signs saying that "Pittsburgh Welcomes the World." It is a sad commentary on the state of the world that the leaders who will gather here will not really be able to respond to that sincere welcome as they will, of necessity, be surrounded by a temporary addition to the Pittsburgh streetscape, namely chain link fence barricades seven feet tall that form a wall surrounding areas closed off to even pedestrians. The barricade required for security is also a barricade in many respects between the people who come to work every day in this city and in cities like it around the world and the leaders who will be shaping the economic policies that will have an impact on the residents of Pittsburgh and all those other cities and towns of the world.

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