



Lawmakers lay down courtroom cover for 3-D-printed gun inventor

Perry Chiaramonte

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Some 15 lawmakers are providing legal cover for the creator of a 3-D-printed gun, saying the State Department went too far two years ago when it forced him to take down online blueprints for the do-it-yourself weapon.

The members of Congress, led by Rep. Thomas Massie, R-Kent., signed onto an amicus brief in the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals, where Texas inventor Cody Wilson is fighting a lower court ruling in favor of the government agency. The State Department in 2013, citing a law allowing it to regulate international arms trafficking, blocked Wilson and his nonprofit group Defense Distributed from posting technical data for 3-D printing of legal handguns.

A notice posted June 3 in a Federal Register shows that some changes were made to the International Traffic in Arms (ITAR) regulations. Hidden within the proposal, which restricts what gear, technology, and information can and cannot be exported out of the U.S., was a tweak that more explicitly banned the posting of schematics for 3-D printed gun parts online.

The change came just one month after Wilson and Defense Distributed filed a lawsuit seeking an injunction blocking the federal government from continuing to bar them from posting blueprints of the “Liberator” 3-D-printed gun on their website.

“I think this is significant,” Wilson told FoxNews.com. “When people who draft the laws are saying that it’s being misused by the administration, I think that says a lot.”

A District Court judge on Aug. 7 denied Wilson's bid for an injunction, prompting the appeal to the Fifth Circuit.

Wilson has received more "friend of the court" backup from policy think tank Cato Institute and various free speech organizations.

The lawmakers say in their brief that the State Department ban violates Wilson's First, Second and Fifth Amendment rights. The document also asserts the State Department ignored legislative intent when it cited the Arms Export Control Act and its dominion over foreign relations to censor public speech in the U.S.

"We expect the Court to recognize that the State Department exceeded the authority granted to it by Congress and violated the First, Second, and Fifth Amendments to the Constitution," said Massie in a statement to FoxNews.com. "If the State Department's violations are allowed to stand, it could have dramatic implications for free speech on the Internet."

Wilson, a former law student at the University of Texas, came into the public eye after creating the world's first 3D-printed gun from scratch. He has said in the past that the "Liberator" project was intended to highlight how technology can render laws and governments all but irrelevant.

His publishing of the blueprints online instantly sparked outrage in the U.S., with several politicians calling for an outright ban on 3-D-printed guns.

"Security checkpoints, background checks and gun regulations will do little good if criminals can print plastic firearms at home and bring those firearms through metal detectors with no one the wiser," Rep. Steve Israel, D-N.Y., said in 2013.

Wilson complied when ordered to remove the Liberator digital designs from the Defense Distributed website, but spent the next two years attempting to file legal paperwork that would allow him to post the plans in compliance with federal regulations. He eventually opted to sue to block the State Department from stopping him.