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[Christopher Barron](#)

Christopher Barron is Chairman of the GOProud Board of Directors and President of CapSouth Consulting in Washington.

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## **Concealed Carry: If You're Interested in Preventing Hate Crimes, Let's Stop them Before They Happen**

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Twenty-five years ago, Tom Palmer and a male companion were threatened by a group of 20 or so young males on an empty street in San Jose, California. The group shouted anti-gay epithets and made death threats.

Palmer and his companion ran, and the attackers gave chase. Moments later, Palmer pulled out a 9 mm semi-automatic pistol, one he owned legally, and pointed it at the group. Palmer was positive they intended to seriously harm or even kill him and his companion.

The gun stopped the group in their tracks. Palmer told them that if they got any closer to him, he would use the gun and shoot. The young men didn't take that chance, and Palmer credits that pistol for saving his life.

Tom, who currently works as a scholar at the libertarian Cato Institute, knows first hand that a gun can save your life.

This summer, the Senate will consider the Matthew Shepard Local Law Enforcement Enhancement Hate Crimes Prevention Act, more commonly know as Hate Crimes legislation. Unfortunately, the bill, as currently written, will do little to actually prevent violent hate crimes from occurring. There is, however, a way to stop hate crimes before they happen: help law-abiding Americans at risk of hate crimes defend themselves from predators.

While GOProud, the only national gay conservative group, doesn't take a position on the current hate crimes legislation, we do strongly support empowering individuals to protect themselves - which is why GOProud urges the Senate to amend the current hate crimes legislation to include a provision dealing with concealed carry reciprocity.

A bill in the Senate, S. 845, co-sponsored by Senator John Thune (R-SD) and Senator David Vitter (R-LA), allows for reciprocity among all the states that currently allow citizens to lawfully carry a concealed firearm.

This common sense legislation would allow an individual who is lawfully licensed to carry a concealed weapon in his home state, to also carry a concealed weapon in another state - as long as that state permits conceal carry and as long as the individual complies with the concealed carry law of that state. An individual's constitutional right to defend himself or herself should not arbitrarily stop at a state line. This is particularly the case when traveling to a state that also permits concealed carry.

GOProud is not alone in their fight to empower law-abiding individuals by protecting their 2nd Amendment rights. Gun Owners of America, an organization representing hundreds of thousands of Americans, strongly supports S. 845, and supports adding concealed carry reciprocity to the hate crimes bill.

Gun Owners of America is the organization that helped lead the successful efforts to amend recent credit card legislation to include a provision allowing for the lawful exercise of 2nd amendment rights in national parks and refuges. Gun Owners of America shares our commitment to empowering individuals to defend themselves lawfully from becoming victims of violent crime.

No matter what the left wants you to believe, the truth is that law-abiding gun use saves lives. Guns are used 2.5 million times a year in self defense - that's 6,850 times a day in this country. Furthermore, concealed carry laws have reduced murder and crime rates in states that have enacted them.

According to a comprehensive study which reviewed crime statistics in every county in the United States from 1977 to 1992, states that passed concealed carry law reduced their rate of murder by 8.5%, rape by 5%, aggravated assault by 7%, and robbery by 3%.

Some on the left will argue that this amendment would be a poison pill -- an amendment intended simply to kill hate crimes legislation. This amendment isn't a poison pill -- like it or not hate crimes legislation will pass, and by a wide margin, with or without a concealed carry reciprocity amendment.

No one argues that violent crime is not a problem, and no one should doubt that there are groups of individuals who are targeted just because of who they are -- be it because they of their race, religion or sexual orientation. While good and honest people can differ on the best and most constitutional way to deal with this problem, all of us can and should agree that it is a problem.

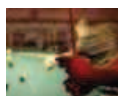
If Congress is actually interested in preventing violent hate crimes, they should pass legislation that will empower individuals to defend themselves before they become another hate crime victim.

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