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Guns: Not Just for the Home Anymore

Brian Doherty | February 22, 2010

The *Washington Post* has an [interesting profile](#) of longtime libertarian activist and fighter for gun possession rights, Tom Palmer. Palmer was one of the original plaintiffs in the *Heller* case, which vindicated the Second Amendment by overturning D.C.'s ban on handgun ownership. (Palmer was booted from the case for technical standing reasons before it reached the Supreme Court.)

Palmer is now one of the plaintiffs in a new legal challenge to still-existing D.C. laws that prohibit the public carrying ("bearing," as in "the right to keep and bear arms") of your gun in D.C.

The *Post* story features Palmer's dramatic retelling of the incident that convinced him in his bones, not just from his philosophical predilections, that bearing arms in public can save lives, since his bearing arms saved his from some gay-bashing thugs. (That story is also told in my book on the *Heller* case, [Gun Control on Trial](#).)

The story also nicely sums up the public policy reasons--as opposed to constitutional reasons--why some people in D.C. are scared to death of a victory for Palmer and his fellow plaintiffs:

Peter Nickles, the District's attorney general, [thinks] allowing handguns to be kept in homes in one of the most dangerous cities in the country was bad enough. Permitting people to pack heat while they walk around -- amid presidential motorcades, foreign dignitaries, public protests -- is downright crazy, he says. And it makes already difficult police work even harder.

"This is a unique jurisdiction, and it requires a unique sensitivity to balance safety and the Second Amendment right to, quote, bear arms," he says. "That's because it's the nation's capital. . . . So the idea that an individual should be able to carry arms on the street -- indeed, concealed on the street -- is very scary."

Jonathan E. Lowy, a lawyer with the [Brady Center to Prevent Gun Violence](#), says he thinks the case, pending in U.S. District Court, is open and shut.

"To force the general public to be exposed to the risk of loaded guns when they are out with their family in public areas is outrageous and has absolutely nothing to do with the right to defend the home," he says.

As Tim Lynch, who like Palmer works at the Cato Institute, [explains](#), "Most criminal attacks occur outside the home (around 87%) and the criminals are armed and always have the advantage of

choosing when they'll strike — and that's usually when there are no cops around."

Thus, if the right to defend yourself against assault should be honored by the U.S. government, there is little reasonable justification for restricting that right to only the home. And there is no civilized right more basic than self-defense; indeed, to make such defense more efficient and wide-ranging is one of the only legitimate reasons for government at all, thus making localities' attempts to bar its citizens from practicing the right effectively particularly pernicious.

Wiki's [useful page](#) of national laws regarding concealed public carry of weapons. The *L.A. Times* on the controversial "[open carry](#)" movement where you let your self-defense flag fly by letting everyone see you are strapped. Rep. Cliff Stearns (Re-Fla.) in *Human Events* [defends](#) his state's "shall issue" standard, which is more and more the standard across the nation, for issuing carry permits as a sensible, and constitutional, public safety measure, for Florida and everyone.