

Mr. Speaker, just as it's my right as a citizen to protect my home and family, it is my responsibility as a Member of Congress to protect our citizens' constitutional rights. Let's focus our law enforcement efforts on preventing and punishing real violent crimes rather than denying second amendment rights to honest Americans—whether they're from Idaho or the District of Columbia.

Mr. LANGEVIN. Mr. Speaker, today I rise in strong opposition to H.R. 3193, legislation that would repeal Washington, DC's, self-enacted gun ban. For nearly 30 years, this ban has protected the citizens of Washington and the city's 20 million annual tourists. Over the last year, D.C. homicides are down 24 percent, and there have been 55 percent fewer murders since 1994. While the ban has not been perfect, there is no excuse for Congress making it easier for murderers and terrorists to get their hands on legal assault weapons. More guns will lead to more murders.

If enacted, H.R. 3193 would repeal the District's ban on handguns and semiautomatic firearms, including assault weapons, and end criminal penalties for failure to register a gun. This ban was enacted by an elected mayor and city council in 1976 and has never been eroded by legislation or court challenge. The House is now attempting to change the will of elected D.C. officials, but Washington does not even have a voting representative to voice the will of the people most affected by this legislation.

The dangers inherent in this bill are complicated by the recent expiration of the assault weapons ban. Should this bill become law, someone could purchase an Uzi or AK-47 and legally keep it at his or her home within sight of the White House, Capitol Building, or Supreme Court. During this time of unprecedented security, weakening gun laws will only make the job of law enforcement officers more difficult and more dangerous.

Unfortunately, the rule prevents all amendments, including those to ban assault weapons and cop-killer bullets. Without these life-saving provisions, it is only a matter of time until a member of the Metropolitan Police Department, U.S. Capitol Police, Secret Service, or other law enforcement officer is outgunned with a legal assault weapon.

Washington, DC, has the right to determine its own laws, and those laws deserve our respect. As D.C. Police Chief Charles Ramsey recently stated, "We don't need a law that puts more assault weapons in circulation in D.C." I urge my colleagues to join me in opposing H.R. 3193.

Mr. UDALL of Colorado. Mr. Speaker, I cannot support this bill, which would repeal a number of local laws adopted by the District of Columbia City Council and would prohibit the passage of similar local laws in the future.

The laws in question deal with regulation of firearms. But that is not the reason for my opposition.

Instead, I oppose the bill because I think its enactment would be an abuse of our authority as Members of Congress. Its effect would be to reduce the right of self-government for one group of Americans—those who reside in Washington, DC.

I know the Constitution gives Congress the power "to exercise exclusive legislation in all cases whatsoever" over the District of Columbia—even though the residents of the district are not fully represented in either the House of Representatives or the U.S. Senate.

But Congress, through the Home Rule Act, has authorized the district's residents to elect a city council and mayor who will be immediately responsible for governing the city.

I am convinced this was the right thing to do. I support home rule for Washington, DC, because I think Americans who live in the district deserve to be able to govern themselves as much as possible consistent with the necessary functioning of the Federal Government. And this bill flies in the face of that principle.

It's true that the bill includes a "finding" that its enactment "is required to correct the District of Columbia's law in order to restore the rights of its citizens under the second amendment to the United States Constitution and thereby enhance public safety." But I don't think that settles the matter.

I take seriously my oath to uphold the Constitution. But I am not convinced that fidelity to that oath requires a vote to repeal these local laws—especially since as far as I know there has been no successful challenge to their constitutionality in all the years they have been on the books.

And I certainly don't think fidelity to my oath requires me to support a reduction in the authority of the D.C. City Council to pass similar laws in the future, as this bill would do.

Further, while there is plenty of room to debate whether repealing these particular laws would or would not enhance public safety—just as there is room to debate whether the laws themselves are desirable or effective—I think that debate should not take place here in Congress. The laws this bill would repeal were duly adopted by the elected government of the district and they have not interfered with the orderly functioning of the Federal Government. So, in my opinion, decisions about retaining, amending, or repealing these local laws should be made by the city council—a body that is elected by and accountable to the people who are subject to them.

Instead, by passing this bill Congress would substitute its judgment for that of the local elected government—in effect denying their constituents the right to govern themselves on this subject.

We cannot—and we should not—do that to the residents of Colorado or any other State. I do not think we should do it to the people who live here in Washington, DC. We may not think these local laws are well-designed. But I think we should allow those covered by the laws to decide that for themselves.

Mr. PAUL. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of House Resolution 3193, the District of Columbia Personal Protection Act. I am a cosponsor of this legislation that ensures greater respect for the right to bear arms in Washington, DC.

H.R. 3193 repeals several of the more draconian citywide Washington, DC, gun restrictions enacted in 1976. Restrictions H.R. 3193 will repeal include the requirement that all firearms be registered. Gun registration in other countries has created government lists of who owns what guns. Such lists facilitate the harassment of gun owners and the confiscation of their guns. Also repealed are blanket bans on the possession of handguns and handgun ammunition as well as any semi-automatic guns. These bans exist despite the fact that handguns and semi-automatic guns are regularly used outside Washington, DC, for self-defense. Also repealed is the prohibition on carrying a gun on one's own property. It is hard to say a person is free if he is prohibited from

using the means of protecting himself and his family even in his own home.

It is unfortunate that people in the federal capital city have for nearly 30 years faced some of the most restrictive gun control laws in the country. This fact is particularly unfortunate given Washington, DC's recent history as the murder capital of the United States. Ironically, the place where people most need to bear arms to defend themselves from violent crimes has been one of the places where the exercise of that right has been most restricted.

A strong case can be made that the high rate of violent crimes, including murders, in Washington, DC, is due in part to restrictions on the exercise of the right to bear arms. When potential victims are likely armed, criminals think twice about committing violent crimes; a gun in the hands of a law-abiding citizen is an excellent deterrent to crime. Across the Potomac River from Washington, DC, Virginia does not have this horrific crime and murder rate. Yet, people in Virginia can buy, own, and even carry guns in public.

I am hopeful that the House's consideration of H.R. 3193 indicates a new openness to legislation that will roll back other unconstitutional and dangerous restrictions on Americans' right to bear arms. For years, federal lawmakers have been passing gun control laws, even though they have no authority to do so. Crime control, the stated reason for passing gun control laws in the first place, is a function belonging to the states.

Enacting H.R. 3193 would be a good first step in adopting legislation to restore the Federal Government's respect for the right to bear arms throughout the United States. The Federal Government has trampled on gun rights nationwide—not just in Washington, DC. I have introduced several pieces of legislation this Congress that would help restore respect for the right to bear arms, including the Second Amendment Protection Act, H.R. 153, that would repeal the now-sunset semi-auto ban, repeal the 5-day waiting period and "instant" background check imposed on gun purchases, and delete the "sporting purposes" test that allows the Treasury Secretary to classify a firearm as a destructive device simply because the Secretary deems the gun to be "non-sporting." Additionally, Congress should consider my Right to Keep and Bear Arms Act, H.R. 3125, that prohibits U.S. taxpayers' dollars from being used to support or promote any United Nations actions that could infringe on the second amendment.

In 1976, I spoke on the floor of the House against the adoption of restrictions on the right to bear arms in Washington, DC, that H.R. 3193 seeks to repeal. Unfortunately, my argument then was ruled out of order, and the restrictions went into effect. While it has been too long in coming, I am glad that the House is finally considering this important issue. The District of Columbia Personal Protection Act would restore some much needed respect for the fundamental rights of people in Washington, DC.

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, I stand today in firm opposition to this legislation, which aims to repeal Washington, DC's local gun ban. I find it troubling and illogical that the House is repealing a ban on handguns and assault weapons in a city where the Federal Government has invested millions of dollars to increase and improve security. It is foolhardy for Congress to counter these actions by allowing loaded assault weapons to be carried