

No. 07-290

IN THE
Supreme Court of the United States

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA AND
ADRIAN M. FENTY, MAYOR OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA,
Petitioners,

v.

DICK ANTHONY HELLER,
Respondent.

**On Writ of Certiorari to the
United States Court of Appeals for the
District of Columbia Circuit**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
TABLE OF AUTHORITIES	ii
ARGUMENT	1
I. THE SECOND AMENDMENT PROTECTS ONLY MILITIA-RELATED FIREARM RIGHTS.....	1
A. The Amendment’s Text, History, And Purposes All Support A Militia- Related Right.	3
B. The Theories Offered By Respondent And The United States Are Contrary To The Amendment’s Text, History, And Purposes.	10
II. LEGISLATION CONFINED TO THE DISTRICT, LIKE OTHER STATE AND LOCAL GUN REGULATION, DOES NOT INFRINGE THE SECOND AMENDMENT.....	16
III. THE DISTRICT’S LAWS ARE IN ANY EVENT PERMISSIBLE REGULATIONS OF RESPONDENT’S ASSERTED RIGHTS.....	19
A. Respondent’s Proposed Rules Are Insupportable.	20
B. The District’s Laws Satisfy The United States’ Proposed Standard	24
C. The District’s Laws Are Reasonable And Should Be Upheld.	27
CONCLUSION.....	29

TABLE OF AUTHORITIES

Page(s)

CASES

<i>Andrews v. United States</i> , 922 A.2d 449 (D.C. 2007).....	26
<i>Arkansas v. Buzzard</i> , 4 Ark. 18 (1842)	6
<i>Ayotte v. Planned Parenthood</i> , 546 U.S. 320 (2006).....	29
<i>Burson v. Freeman</i> , 504 U.S. 191 (1992).....	23
<i>D.C. Common Cause v. District of Columbia</i> , 858 F.2d 1 (D.C. Cir. 1988).....	18
<i>District of Columbia v. Carter</i> , 409 U.S. 418 (1973).....	18
<i>Eldred v. Ashcroft</i> , 537 U.S. 186 (2003).....	4
<i>Graham v. John Deere Co.</i> , 383 U.S. 1 (1966).....	4
<i>Johnson v. California</i> , 543 U.S. 499 (2005).....	23
<i>Lewis v. United States</i> , 445 U.S. 55 (1980).....	22
<i>Louisiana v. Smith</i> , 11 La. Ann. 633 (1856)	6
<i>McIntosh v. Washington</i> , 395 A.2d 744 (D.C. 1978).....	28
<i>New York v. United States</i> , 505 U.S. 144 (1992).....	16
<i>O'Donoghue v. United States</i> , 289 U.S. 516 (1933).....	18

TABLE OF AUTHORITIES
(continued)

	Page(s)
<i>Presser v. Illinois</i> , 116 U.S. 252 (1886).....	17
<i>Printz v. United States</i> , 521 U.S. 898 (1997).....	5
<i>Seegars v. Ashcroft</i> , 297 F. Supp. 2d 201 (D.D.C. 2004).....	18
<i>U.S. Term Limits, Inc. v. Thornton</i> , 514 U.S. 779 (1995).....	16
<i>United States v. Miller</i> , 307 U.S. 174 (1939).....	3, 12, 20
<i>United States v. Toner</i> , 728 F.2d 115 (2d Cir. 1984).....	24
<i>Washington v. Glucksberg</i> , 521 U.S. 702 (1997).....	23

STATUTES

18 U.S.C. § 922.....	26
D.C. Code § 7-2502.02.....	26
D.C. Code § 49-404.....	18
D.C. Code § 49-405.....	18
D.C. Code § 49-409.....	18

CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS

Pa. Const. art. VIII (1776).....	6
U.S. Const. art. I, § 8, cl.15.....	10
U.S. Const. art. I, § 8, cl.16.....	2, 6
U.S. Const. art. I, § 8, cl.17.....	25
U.S. Const. art. I, § 10, cl.3.....	17
U.S. Const. art. III, § 3.....	10

TABLE OF AUTHORITIES

(continued)

	Page(s)
U.S. Const. amend. II.....	<i>passim</i>
OTHER AUTHORITIES	
Joel P. Bishop, <i>Commentaries on the Law of Statutory Crimes</i> (1883)	6
William Blackstone, <i>Commentaries on the Laws of England</i> (1765).....	6, 14, 15
<i>The Complete Bill of Rights: The Drafts, Debates, Sources, and Origins</i> (Neil H. Cogan ed., 1997).....	5
Saul Cornell, <i>The Original Meaning of Original Understanding: A Neo-Blackstonian Critique</i> , 67 Md. L. Rev. 150 (2007)	13
John Hart Ely, <i>Democracy and Distrust: A Theory of Judicial Review</i> 146 (1980).....	23
Federalist No. 43 (James Madison).....	25
Federalist No. 46 (James Madison).....	2, 12
Steven J. Heyman, <i>Natural Rights and the Second Amendment</i> , 76 Chi.-Kent L. Rev. 237 (2000)	15
Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774–1789	12
James Kent, <i>Commentaries on American Law</i> (1826).....	4, 6
Nathaniel Kozuskanich, <i>Originalism, History, and the Second Amendment: What Did Bearing Arms Really Mean to the Founders?</i> , 10 U. Pa. J. Const. L. 413 (2008).....	7

TABLE OF AUTHORITIES
(continued)

	Page(s)
Letter from George Mason to Martin Cockburn, <i>reprinted in</i> Kate Mason Rowland, <i>Life and Correspondence of George Mason</i> (1892)	11
Benjamin L. Oliver, <i>The Rights of an American Citizen</i> (1832)	6
Antonin Scalia, <i>Response, in A Matter of Interpretation: Federal Courts and the Law</i> (Amy Gutmann ed., 1997)	17
L.G. Schworer, <i>To Hold and Bear Arms</i> , 76 Chi.-Kent L. Rev. 27 (2000)	14, 15
Joseph Story, <i>Commentaries on the Constitution of the United States</i> (1833).....	2, 4, 6
Laurence H. Tribe, <i>Sanity and the Second Amendment</i> , Wall St. J., Mar. 4, 2008, at A16	17
Adam Winkler, <i>Fundamentally Wrong About Fundamental Rights</i> , 23 Const. Comment. 227 (2006)	23

ARGUMENT

This Court should reverse the decision below for any of three independent reasons. First, only the District's view that the Amendment protects a militia-related right makes sense of its language, history, and purposes. Second, the Amendment was enacted to preserve state autonomy from federal interference and imposes no limitation on the District's laws. Third, the Amendment does not, in any event, confer a right to possess the weapons of one's choosing. The District's decision to ban a particularly dangerous weapon while permitting access to other weapons, including rifles and shotguns, should be upheld.

I. THE SECOND AMENDMENT PROTECTS ONLY MILITIA-RELATED FIREARM RIGHTS.

When the Framers submitted the Constitution to state ratifying conventions, the ensuing political debate was one of the most divisive in American history. By proposing to transfer authority from state governments to a distant national government, the Constitution seemed (to some) to threaten the democratic principles upon which the states had governed themselves in the decade since independence.

In particular, some were alarmed by the Constitution's grant of powers to the national government to create a standing army and exercise substantial control over state militias. Many viewed a professional standing army as a threat to liberty, preferring to keep military force in the hands of "the people," assembled as citizen-soldiers, "fighting for their common liberties, and united and conducted by governments possessing their affections and confi-

dence.” Federalist No. 46 (James Madison). The militia—considered in this very real sense to be “the people”—would temporarily put aside their livelihoods to take up arms when called to defend their communities.

One clause of the Constitution was thus a lightning rod for criticism: Article I, § 8, cl.16, which gave Congress the power “to provide for organizing, arming, and disciplining, the Militia.” The notion that the distant national government could “provide for [the] . . . arming” (and thus effectively the “disarming”) of the militias became “a topic of serious alarm and powerful objection.” 3 Joseph Story, *Commentaries on the Constitution of the United States* § 1201, at 84 (1833).

As its text makes clear, the Second Amendment directly responded to this grant of power. The Amendment prevents Congress from interfering with the right of the people of each state to arm a well-regulated militia composed not of professional soldiers, but of the people themselves.

Respondent and the United States offer competing readings of the Amendment which are not only unsupported by its text and history, but utterly at odds with both. Respondent’s proposed right of insurrection turns history on its head: states wanted to maintain control over the arming of their militias to defeat, not to promote, rebellion. And the United States’ reading engrafts onto the Amendment a free-standing personal liberty right unrelated to any state’s ability to maintain a militia.

The Amendment’s text and history make clear that the right the Amendment enshrines requires some connection to a state militia. The nature and

quality of the connection an individual must show to raise a successful challenge need not be resolved in this case. Respondent has not alleged—and cannot establish—*any* connection between his desire to own a handgun and a well-regulated militia.

A. The Amendment’s Text, History, And Purposes All Support A Militia-Related Right.

The “declaration *and* guarantee” of the Amendment “must be interpreted and applied” “in view” of its “obvious purpose” of protecting state militias. *United States v. Miller*, 307 U.S. 174, 178 (1939) (emphasis added). The District’s reading gives meaning to every word of the Amendment and comports with its history and “obvious purpose.” *Id.*

1. The first half of the Amendment—“a well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State”—so plainly supports the District’s position that respondent, like the United States and the court below, is reduced to arguing that it must be given *no* operative effect whatsoever. Respondent’s Brief (RBr) 5; United States’ Brief (USBr) 14; PA34a-35a. But reading half the Amendment out of the text cannot be reconciled either with this Court’s repeated condemnation of interpretations that render constitutional language irrelevant, see Petitioners’ Brief (PBr) 17; Brief of Brady Center (BCBr) 6, or with the considerable attention the Framers focused on this language during the Amendment’s drafting, PBr27-29.

Respondent nevertheless contends that the Court should ignore the Amendment’s declaration, which he calls the “preamble,” because the second half of the Amendment is “clear and positive,” requiring no

further elaboration. See RBr5-8. But that misstates the rule of construction on which respondent relies. See, e.g., 1 Story, *supra*, § 459, at 443 (“[t]he importance of examining the preamble, for the purpose of expounding the language of a statute, has been long felt, and universally conceded in all juridical discussions”). Giving effect to all of the Amendment’s language is especially vital here because the declaration is not a separate preamble, but an absolute clause within the Amendment itself. Brief of Linguists (LingBr) 14; BCB8-9; 1 James Kent, *Commentaries on American Law* 431-32 (1826).¹

2. In any event, respondent cannot show that the second half of the Amendment “clear[ly] and positive[ly]” supports his position. Respondent cannot explain why a non-militia right so “clear[ly]” protected by the second part of the Amendment has nevertheless been overlooked by multiple adverse precedents, including *Miller*. The United States confirms the lack of clarity by offering an interpretation that differs from both its own longstanding position, see Brief of Former Department of Justice Officials 9, and *Miller* itself, see USBr20 n.4 (noting that *Miller* “differs in some respects” from the United States’ position).

¹ Respondent suggests that the Copyright Clause also contains a meaningless “preamble,” but in *Graham v. John Deere Co.*, 383 U.S. 1 (1966), this Court held that this language is a “constitutional command” that “may not be ignored,” *id.* at 6. See also *Eldred v. Ashcroft*, 537 U.S. 186, 212 (2003) (Copyright Clause is “both a grant of power and a limitation” (quoting *Graham*, 383 U.S. at 6)); BCB7-10 (discussing state constitutions).

a. Respondent and the United States argue that the Amendment's use of "the right" shows that it is enforceable by individuals. RBr9-10; USBr11. The District agrees. *Cf. Printz v. United States*, 521 U.S. 898, 918 (1997) (structural rights may be enforced by individuals). But that says nothing about *what* right individuals may enforce.

Nor does it advance respondent's position to argue that the phrase "*the* right" must be read to refer to some pre-existing right. See RBr18; see also USBr12. The right of the people to keep and bear arms in connection with militia service was a pre-existing right, recognized by states prior to the Founding in an effort to provide for their defense. Massachusetts and North Carolina, for instance, recognized the right of the people to "keep and bear arms for the common defense" and "to Bear Arms, for the Defense of the State." CertPet12; see also PBr30-31 (Delaware, Maryland, Virginia); PBr13 & n.1; Brief of American Jewish Committee (AJCBr) 9; Brief of Historians (HBr) 10-11. By contrast, *no* state recognized a right to "bear Arms" for private purposes. PBr30-31; HBr10. Contrary to respondent's suggestion that Pennsylvania protected a private right to arms, RBr12, its constitution separately protected hunting (without any mention of the right to "bear arms," HBr10 n.3), and the provision protecting the right to "bear arms for the defense of themselves and the State" encompassed only the right to engage in military defense on behalf of the community, PBr31. That is proven by its conscientious objector clause, which used the phrase "bearing arms" to refer exclusively to military service. See *The Complete Bill of Rights: The Drafts, Debates, Sources, and Origins* 184 (Neil H. Cogan ed., 1997).

The Second Amendment was enacted precisely because Anti-Federalists feared that the Constitution's Militia Clauses, which authorize Congress to "organiz[e], arm[], and disciplin[e], the Militia," U.S. Const. art. I, § 8, cl.16 (emphasis added), threatened this pre-existing militia-related right. As George Mason explained at the Virginia Ratifying Convention, "[t]he militia may here be destroyed . . . by rendering them useless—by disarming them." PA24; see also AJCBr15-17, 80a. The Amendment directly and proportionately responded to these concerns by protecting the right of the people to be armed in connection with state militias.²

Respondent suggests that it is "strange" to limit "the right" to militia-related conduct entailing a duty to "obey orders." RBr10. But "rights" and "duties" were often linked at the Founding. See, e.g., 1 Kent, *supra*, at 397-98; 2 *id.* 33-63; 1 William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England* *119-23, *157, *237-38, *243-44 (1765); Pa. Const. art. VIII (1776). Respondent's authorities recognize that the "right" at issue involved the concomitant duty to defend the new republic. RBr13 ("The constitutions of most of our States assert" that it is the people's "right *and duty* to be at all times armed" (quoting Thomas Jefferson) (emphasis added)); see also HBr18.

² Nineteenth-century scholars and jurists also accepted the principle that the Amendment protects a militia-related right. See, e.g., CertReply3 n.3; 3 Story, *supra*, § 1890, at 746; Benjamin L. Oliver, *The Rights of an American Citizen* 176 (1832); Joel P. Bishop, *Commentaries on the Law of Statutory Crimes* § 792, at 497-98 (1883); *Louisiana v. Smith*, 11 La. Ann. 633, 633 (1856); *Arkansas v. Buzzard*, 4 Ark. 18, 19-20 (1842); BCB13 (discussing *Aymette v. State*, 21 Tenn. 154 (1840)).

b. Respondent contends that, because it uses the phrase “the people,” the Amendment’s guarantee must sweep more broadly than its declaration, which refers only to “a well regulated Militia.” In fact, the two phrases are tightly connected, because there was little space between “the people” and the “Militia” at the Framing. RBr15-16; USBr16. The militia consisted of citizen-soldiers drawn from the community, as opposed to full-time professional soldiers lacking allegiance to it. RBr15 (quoting Mason). “[T]he people” of the guarantee draws the same distinction: the Framers sought to distinguish the “Militia” from professional standing armies. BCB27-29. As Federal Farmer explained, the “Militia” were “the people, immediately under the management of the state governments.” AJCBr18-19; *see also* PBr20-21.

c. Most importantly, the phrase that defines the right—“to keep and bear Arms”—supports the District’s position. The Framers used that phrase—as opposed to the formulations upon which respondent relies, *see* RBr11 (“bear . . . guns”)—because this idiomatic expression referred to the use of arms in a military context. Every use of the phrase “bear Arms” in congressional debates from 1774 to 1821 supports the District’s military reading. PBr16; LingBr18-27; *see also* Nathaniel Kozuskanich, *Originalism, History, and the Second Amendment: What Did Bearing Arms Really Mean to the Founders?*, 10 U. Pa. J. Const. L. 413, 416 (forthcoming 2008) (*available at* <http://www.law.upenn.edu/journals/conlaw/articles/vol10num3/kozuskanich.pdf>). Madison’s original inclusion of a conscientious objector clause exempting “any person religiously scrupulous of bearing arms” confirms the point. LingBr23; BCB23-25. Respondent’s only response is that the

words “Arms” and “bear Arms” did not have a “uniquely” or “exclusive[ly]” military meaning at the Founding. RBr10-11. But even if that were so, respondent does not and could not argue that his reading of “keep and bear Arms” is the more natural one—let alone that the phrase “clear[ly] and positive[ly]” compels his non-military reading.

Seeking to elide that obvious problem, respondent argues that the words “keep” and “bear” “embody distinct concepts in the Second Amendment.” RBr10. But ripping the words “keep” and “bear” out of their context deprives them of their natural meaning when read as part of the Amendment as a whole.

Respondent’s claim that the word “keep” means “possess at home,” RBr10, for example, says nothing about *why* arms could be kept at home. The purpose of the word “keep” was to ensure citizen-soldiers access to “Arms” so that, when called into service, they could “bear” them. *See, e.g.*, LingBr27; BCB20-22&26. That was the meaning of “keep” in the most relevant authorities: contemporary state constitutions and militia laws. PBr16-17, 30. Respondent and his *amici* can point only to other statutes and contexts lacking the critical military language surrounding the word “keep” in the Second Amendment. RBr10-11; Brief of Cato Institute 12-14.

Respondent’s argument that “bear” means “carry” has similar shortcomings. RBr11. Stripped of its context, it suggests to respondent that the Framers meant to ensure the people could possess (“keep”) and carry (“bear”) arms without expressly protecting *any* particular uses, even in militia service—a reading fundamentally at odds with the text and history

of the Amendment. The District's reading, by contrast, makes sense of the Amendment as a whole.

3. The Amendment's drafting history confirms that the right the Framers protected was militia-related. PBr27-29. Respondent asserts that Madison meant to incorporate proposals by the New Hampshire ratifying convention and by *dissenters* in Pennsylvania and Massachusetts. RBr37-38. The suggestion that Madison intended to endorse those decidedly atypical formulations, while studiously avoiding their language, is untenable. AJCBr20; PBr32-33.

The Amendment's drafters considered various proposals that would have altered the delicate compromise struck in Article One, which gave Congress authority to ensure the militias were capable of performing their responsibilities, while preserving to the individual states some control over them. For example, the Framers found it unnecessary to include the language "for the common defence," which might have been read to suggest that the militias could only be used for the Union's "common defence," thereby limiting the power of the individual states to use their militias to suppress localized insurrections like Shays' Rebellion. PBr29.

Federalists also rejected a Virginia proposal that would have given the states authority to "organiz[e], arm[], and disciplin[e]" the militia because they were unwilling to change the body of the Constitution and feared the proposal would give too much power to the states, preventing the federal government from ensuring that the militia were sufficiently well-regulated and disciplined. See PBr29 n.6; HBr3-4; RBr36. But they adapted the alternative Virginia

proposal, which recognized that “a well armed and well regulated militia [is] the best security of a free country.” PBr27, 29 n.6. Only the District’s position explains the language that was chosen, as well as the language that was not.

B. The Theories Offered By Respondent And The United States Are Contrary To The Amendment’s Text, History, And Purposes.

Neither respondent nor the United States provides an account of the Amendment consistent with its text, history, and purposes. Under their views, the Amendment protects a broad right of gun ownership for private purposes, but it provides no protection to the militia *qua* militia.

1. Respondent contends that the Amendment protects the right of individuals and private “militias” to “resist tyranny” by engaging in armed insurrection against their government. RBr30; *see* RBr25, 28. In support of this view, respondent claims that the phrase “well regulated Militia” refers to private militias operating in defiance of government authority. RBr25.

a. The first problem with this claim is that the Constitution does not encourage treason, but criminalizes it. U.S. Const. art. III, § 3. Article One similarly explains that militias are needed to “suppress Insurrections,” not cause them. *Id.* art. I, § 8, cl.15. And the Second Amendment itself states that a “well regulated Militia”—not, as respondent would have it, a militia “beyond the control of, [and] in direct challenge to” the government, *see* RBr25—is “necessary to the security of a free State,” not necessary to overthrow it. PBr15 n.3. Respondent’s view that armed

private citizens may decide for themselves when to rise up and “resist tyranny” is impossible to reconcile with these provisions.

Respondent’s theory also has no support in the Amendment’s history. Respondent fails to cite any evidence from the debates surrounding the Constitution or the Amendment that the Framers intended to facilitate armed insurrection against the government. Instead, respondent relies on events taking place before and during the Revolutionary War. RBr22-35. Even if those events were relevant, respondent’s argument would fail: the colonists did not endorse private insurrection by individuals, but instead made every effort to give their actions legitimacy under law. See Letter from George Mason to Martin Cockburn (Aug. 22, 1775), reprinted in Kate Mason Rowland, *Life and Correspondence of George Mason* 206, 208 (1892).

More important, the Second Amendment was not enacted before or during the Revolutionary War, but only after a critical intervening decade had passed. During that period, militias were brought under extensive state control. See PBr12-14. They were also brought under substantial federal control in response to Daniel Shays’ attempt to overthrow Massachusetts’ purportedly “tyrannical” government and its debt collection efforts. PBr22-23; AJCBr12-13. And the Second Amendment then ensured that Congress could not disarm state militias. AJCBr11-13; HBr14-17, 32-33. Those who championed the “well regulated militia” at that time plainly did not have in mind pre-Revolutionary private militias acting in *defiance* of any and all governmental control.

Respondent also wrongly conflates the Framers' views of why resistance to British oppression was justified with their views of what rights Americans possessed against their new government under the Constitution. As early as 1776, states began taking steps to prevent insurrection by disarming individuals who refused to swear loyalty oaths. See AJCBr22-23 (Massachusetts, Pennsylvania); see also 4 Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789, at 201-05 (1906) (Continental Congress recommendation that provincial legislatures disarm all persons "who are notoriously disaffected to the cause of America"). And in 1792, Congress passed two Militia Acts empowering the President to call out state militia to *quash* private rebellions (and to provide for discipline and organization so they would be effective in doing so), see PBr14; BCB15, as George Washington did in 1794 in response to the Whiskey Rebellion, see AJCBr13. Accordingly, although the Framers believed that armed insurrection was justified against the British, they did not enshrine an individual right of insurrection against the "more perfect Union" they fought a war to create. PBr15 n.3; BCB19-20.

b. Respondent's theory is also inconsistent with the Amendment's "obvious purpose." *Miller*, 307 U.S. at 178. The Framers thought the best protection against tyranny was the states, supported by their militias. See Federalist No. 46 (James Madison) ("the existence of subordinate governments, to which the people are attached, and by which the militia officers are appointed, forms a barrier against the enterprises of ambition, more insurmountable than any which a simple government of any form can admit of"); see also HBr32. That is why they pro-

tected militia-related, and only militia-related, rights under the Amendment. Some modern critics may believe that *private* gun ownership is necessary to prevent tyranny. But that was not the view of the Framers, who feared that the wrath of an unregulated and armed people would lead to anarchy. Under the Framers' vision, it was the people acting *through* the "well regulated Militia" who would instead safeguard against oppression.

2. The United States argues that the Amendment protects the "common-law right to possess firearms." USBr13. Its theory is based largely on the assertion that the Amendment protects a pre-existing right. But, as already explained, the District's position is consistent with that view, as well as with the Amendment's text, history, and purposes. By contrast, the United States does not demonstrate that (1) the phrase "keep and bear Arms" is best read as protecting any common-law right; (2) the drafting and ratification history support that reading; or (3) the Framers were concerned that Congress could or would *infringe* that right. See Saul Cornell, *The Original Meaning of Original Understanding: A Neo-Blackstonian Critique*, 67 Md. L. Rev. 150, 161 (2007). The United States is therefore attempting to graft onto the Amendment a free-standing personal liberty interest unrelated to the Amendment's purpose of protecting the states' ability to maintain their militias.

The United States relies heavily on Blackstone in support of its position. USBr18-19. But even if Blackstone's writings could overcome the actual text, history, and purposes of the Amendment, they support the District's position for three reasons. First, Blackstone viewed arms ownership as a civic right of

subjects to participate in the common defense, not an individual right to own guns for private purposes, such as self-defense. See 1 Blackstone, *supra*, at *136-39 (describing the five “auxiliary” rights protecting British subjects against governmental oppression); see also HBr5-8.

Second, although this civic right limited the powers of the Crown, it did *not* limit Parliament’s power. HBr8 (“we may venture to affirm, that the power of parliament is absolute and without control” (quoting 1 Blackstone, *supra*, at *157)). The United States effectively acknowledges this point, noting that “the right secured” was “the right of English subjects ‘of having arms for their defense, *suitable to their condition and degree, and as such as are allowed by law.*” USBr23 (quoting 1 Blackstone, *supra*, at *143-44 (emphasis added)); see also L.G. Schworer, *To Hold and Bear Arms*, 76 Chi.-Kent L. Rev. 27, 55-56 (2000) (“the phrase ‘as allowed by law’ invited recognition of parliament’s law-making authority in the past, the present, and the future”).

Third, this civic right did not permit individuals to decide for themselves when to resist tyranny. As Blackstone explained, “allow[ing] to every individual the right of determining [when resistance to government is appropriate] is . . . [a] doctrine productive of anarchy, and, in consequence, equally fatal to civil liberty, as tyranny itself.” 1 Blackstone, *supra*, at *251.

For these reasons, regulation of firearms by Parliament remained pervasive in England long after the Bill of Rights. AJCBr12 n.3, 28-29; HBr5-7. Shortly after the English Bill of Rights was enacted, Parliament soundly rejected a proposal to “enable

every Protestant to keep a musket in his House for *his defence*,” with opponents stressing that the proposal “savours of the politics to arm the mob, which . . . is not very safe for any government.” Schwoerer, *supra*, at 50-51 (emphasis added).

Blackstone’s *separate* discussion of the common-law right of self-defense, USBr19, also does not support the United States’ position. The civic right discussed above was distinct from the common-law rights of (1) personal security, which encompassed a right to kill to prevent loss of “life and limbs,” 1 Blackstone, *supra*, at *126; and (2) self-defense, which made excusable or justifiable any homicide committed to protect oneself from assault or capital crime, 4 *id.* at *184; *see also* 3 *id.* at *3-4. *See* HBr8; AJCBr12 n.3. Those distinct rights did not encompass any right to own firearms—let alone to “keep and bear Arms.” 4 Blackstone, *supra*, at *183-88. The Court should reject any attempt to conflate what are two separate questions: “what an individual may rightly do when he is subject to imminent attack” and “what measures the legislature may properly take *ex ante* to protect the lives and safety of citizens.” Steven J. Heyman, *Natural Rights and the Second Amendment*, 76 Chi.-Kent L. Rev. 237, 245 (2000).

* * *

Respondent—who is not a member of any militia—nowhere suggests that there is any connection between his desired private use of handguns and any militia, let alone a well-regulated one. Nor could he. The necessary precondition for establishing the requisite connection to that militia would be a determination by the state that handgun ownership is con-

ducive to the establishment or maintenance of its militia. Here, the District not only has declined to require or even permit handgun possession for militia-related purposes; it has barred handgun possession for any private purpose.

II. LEGISLATION CONFINED TO THE DISTRICT, LIKE OTHER STATE AND LOCAL GUN REGULATION, DOES NOT INFRINGE THE SECOND AMENDMENT.

Any reading of the Amendment that recognizes a liberty interest unrelated to a state's ability to maintain a militia could lead to results completely at odds with the Amendment's protection of state autonomy. For example, some of respondent's *amici* contend that a right to gun possession is enforceable not only against national legislation but also against state and local laws. *See* Brief of Texas 23 n.6. That would turn the Amendment, which was designed to limit federal interference with state prerogatives, into a sword *federal* judges could use to strike down measures that *state* and local governments adopt to control the use of weapons within their borders. This is a case in point. *See* Brief of National Rifle Association 11 (contending that the District's laws are misguided because "[a]n *effective* militia cannot spring forth fully-formed from a people unfamiliar with firearms" (emphasis added)).

1. Even if the right the Amendment protects encompasses private uses of weapons, it does so as a vehicle to protect state authority as a counterbalance to federal power. *Cf. U.S. Term Limits, Inc. v. Thornton*, 514 U.S. 779, 838 (1995) (Kennedy, J., concurring) (the Framers' "discovery" was to "split the atom of sovereignty"); *New York v. United States*,

505 U.S. 144, 181 (1992) (“[s]tate sovereignty . . . secur[es] to citizens the liberties that derive from the diffusion of state power”). Because the Amendment was enacted to secure a means of protecting state governments, it makes no sense to hold that the Amendment limits the powers of state and local governments. See Brief of Major American Cities 12-24; Brief of City of Chicago (ChiBr) 4-31; AJCBr5-31; Brief of New York 2-13. The same holds for the District. PBr35-38.

The Amendment’s history also shows that it is only concerned with the powers exercised by a distant federal government. See USBr17. The Constitution’s creation of a standing army under the control of that government made the potential for oppression real, see PBr23; AJCBr80a; USBr17, resulting in calls for protection against it, see AJCBr64a. State and local governments, closer to the people and forbidden from maintaining standing armies, posed no similar threat. See U.S. Const. art. I, § 10, cl.3; PBr20-21. The Framers had no reason to constrain state and local government in making judgments about the arming of their citizenry, and no reason to constrain such judgments in the Seat of Government. PBr37-38; see also Laurence H. Tribe, *Sanity and the Second Amendment*, Wall St. J., Mar. 4, 2008, at A16.

For these reasons, “properly understood,” the Amendment “is no limitation on arms control by the states.” Antonin Scalia, *Response*, in *A Matter of Interpretation: Federal Courts and the Law* 137 n.13 (Amy Gutmann ed., 1997); *Presser v. Illinois*, 116 U.S. 252, 265 (1886).

2. Unlike some of his *amici*, respondent contends that the question of incorporation is not before the Court. RBr64. He argues instead that the Bill of Rights is operative in the District. RBr62-65. Of course it is. But the question “is not whether the Constitution is operative [in the District], for that is self-evident, but whether the provision relied on is applicable.” *O’Donoghue v. United States*, 289 U.S. 516, 542 (1933) (internal citation omitted). Constitutional provisions limiting federal *interference* with state authority do *not* apply to legislation confined to the District. See, e.g., *D.C. Common Cause v. District of Columbia*, 858 F.2d 1, 6-7 (D.C. Cir. 1988) (“the District, unlike the states, has no reserved power to be guaranteed by the Tenth Amendment” (quoting *Lee v. Flintkote Co.*, 593 F.2d 1275, 1278 n.14 (D.C. Cir. 1979))). The District is a creation of the federal Constitution and, unlike the states, has no residual sovereignty to protect against federal encroachment. Rather, *Congress* exercises the powers of a state in asserting legislative control over the District. See *District of Columbia v. Carter*, 409 U.S. 418, 429 (1973) (“[T]he power of Congress over the District of Columbia includes all the legislative powers which a state may exercise over its affairs” (quoting *Berman v. Parker*, 348 U.S. 26, 31 (1954))).

There can therefore be no structural concern that Congress will interfere with the District’s independent sovereign authority here—and respondent asserts none. And although the United States is correct that the District “has a militia statute,” USBr21 n.5, the militia it creates is “essentially a component of the federal government” under the exclusive control of the President. *Seegars v. Ashcroft*, 297 F. Supp. 2d 201, 241 (D.D.C. 2004); see also D.C. Code

§§ 49-404, 405, 409. The statute does not (and cannot) provide the District with independent authority as a counterbalance to federal power.

Assuming the Amendment does not limit the states, respondent's position would uniquely disable the District from enacting gun-control regulations free of the constraints of the Amendment. Given the Framers' intent that the Amendment protect state autonomy from federal interference and, conversely, their desire to create a federal seat of government free of *state* interference, that outcome would be anomalous if not perverse. Legislation regulating guns that would raise no constitutional issue if adopted by the Commonwealth of Virginia or the City of Baltimore would be invalid if adopted for the District either directly by Congress or by the District's own government. That defies common sense.

III. THE DISTRICT'S LAWS ARE IN ANY EVENT PERMISSIBLE REGULATIONS OF RESPONDENT'S ASSERTED RIGHTS.

Even if the Amendment protects respondent's asserted right, the District's laws do not violate that right. The District bans particularly concealable and dangerous handguns while permitting access to other weapons, such as rifles and shotguns, for self-defense—a reasonable legislative decision balancing public safety against self-defense in an exclusively urban environment. Respondent asks the Court to embrace a categorical rule placing off-limits government proscriptions of dangerous weapons claimed necessary to allow individuals to rise up and “resist tyranny.” RBr30. That view is unprecedented, unworkable, and unwise.

A. Respondent's Proposed Rules Are Insupportable.

1. Respondent contends that *any* government prohibition of an "Arm" within the meaning of the Second Amendment is necessarily invalid, without more. That *per se* rule of invalidity would create a constitutional right to own any "Arm," no matter how dangerous. RBr55 n.22. The United States agrees with the District that respondent's claim has no grounding in the text or history of the Amendment. PBr44-45; USBr22-23.

Respondent's rule is based largely on the court of appeals' misreading of *Miller*. PA53a. Although *Miller* held that the *absence* of a connection between the use of a weapon and maintenance of a well-regulated militia undermines a Second Amendment claim, 307 U.S. at 178, it did not hold or suggest the converse: that the private use of a protected arm is always immune from proscription. Respondent attempts to bridge that gap by arguing that categorical inquiries are "often a requisite *first step* in evaluating the constitutionality of governmental action." RBr41 (emphasis added). That is true. But what distinguishes respondent's proposed rule is that the categorical inquiry into whether a weapon is a protected "Arm" is both the first *and* last step in assessing the constitutionality of a gun ban. Respondent fails to identify a single other provision in the Bill of Rights that works that way.

Respondent's *per se* rule is made especially dangerous by the fact that it would seem to apply to an exceedingly broad swath of weapons. Respondent first contends that an arm is constitutionally protected if "it is of the type that (1) civilians would use,

such that they could be expected to possess it for ordinary lawful purposes (in the absence of, or even despite, legal prohibition), and (2) would be useful in militia service." RBr44. But because respondent later explains that the Second Amendment's protections should not be "limit[ed] . . . to arms that have military utility," *id.*, and that weapons used for "the protection of person and property" fall within his definition, *id.* 46, it appears that virtually any weapon falling into common use is immune from proscription, no matter how decisively its costs outweigh its benefits. See PBr45-46.

Respondent's organizing theory of the Second Amendment compels that conclusion. Although respondent attempts to sidestep the logical consequences of his position, it is surely the case that the weapons most likely to be useful to individuals and self-styled militia taking up arms against the government "should our Nation someday suffer tyranny again," RBr32, are those most capable of inflicting harm on a heavily fortified adversary—precisely the same powerful and dangerous weapons most destructive of public safety. Under respondent's conception of the Second Amendment, in other words, the grave threat to public safety that gives governments a paramount interest in *banning* especially dangerous weapons is precisely what operates to put those weapons off-limits to government proscription.

Respondent's test is also unworkable and illogical. It is unclear, for instance, how much of the population must own a particular weapon to make it "common" or what geographic unit determines com-

monness.³ PBr45. More troubling is that respondent's proposed rule works in only one direction over time—it protects an ever-widening category of dangerous weapons once they grow into “common use,” even if they do so “*despite . . . legal prohibition.*” RBr44-46 (emphasis added). Respondent appears to contend that machineguns may already be entitled to categorical protection. RBr50-52 (noting 120,000 machineguns in lawful civilian possession). If weapons are constitutionally protected solely by virtue of their “commonness,” despite government attempts to ban them, then our Nation lacks the fundamental police power to address the potentially catastrophic consequences of private ownership of increasingly dangerous, ever-proliferating weapons. See AJCBr29-31; CertPet23-24.

2. Respondent also urges application of strict scrutiny for all “gun laws,” potentially including laws incidentally affecting gun rights, such as taxes, background checks, and licenses. RBr54-62. Respondent fails to explain why such incidental restrictions warrant the application of strict scrutiny. Given that the District's laws neither implicate the Amendment's core militia-related right nor effectuate functional disarmament, strict scrutiny would be inappropriate *here* even if it were appropriate for laws that intrude into that core. See PBr43-44 & n.11.

At any rate, strict scrutiny is inappropriate for the Second Amendment. See *Lewis v. United States*,

³ If the test depends on whether a weapon is commonly used in the Nation as a whole, that is reason to conclude that the Amendment only applies to national legislation. Otherwise, the Amendment would enable outlier jurisdictions to dictate what weapons other, dissimilar jurisdictions must allow.