



Councilmember Phil Mendelson's

At-Large Update

Councilmember
Phil Mendelson
(At-Large)

March 25, 2009

Voting Rights & Public Safety

The gun amendment attached to the DC Voting Rights Act is a significant problem. The amendment, sponsored by Nevada Senator John Ensign would:

- prohibit the Mayor/Council from legislating in any way that "unduly burdens" an individual's right to possess a gun;
- repeal gun registration entirely;
- permit the possession of assault weapons (they are now prohibited);
- permit domestic violence abusers, persons with multiple DUI/DWI convictions, persons voluntarily committed to mental health institutions, and persons with a history of violent behavior to possess firearms in the District (they are now prohibited); and
- permit persons to carry firearms in their workplace.

Some have said the gun amendment is unwanted but may be a necessary price to pay for voting rights. I disagree. Public Safety is the number one issue for many residents, and gun violence is the number one issue for public safety. To hamstring the police and be unable to legislate whatsoever in the area of gun safety is too high a price.

Make no mistake, Senator Ensign and the NRA want to substitute their own view of the Constitution for that of the Supreme Court. They insist that registration in any form is an unreasonable burden on the Second Amendment, so they would strike our registration law wholesale. But the Supreme Court didn't see it that way. Although the Court struck down our ban on handguns, the Court also ordered us to permit Dick Heller to register his

handgun - in essence, it upheld the Constitutionality of gun registration.

Why does the District want to register firearms so badly? Because chances are, when an unregistered gun is seized by police, they have encountered a criminal (not an otherwise law-abiding citizen). Being able to charge that individual with possession of an unregistered firearm is an important crime fighting tool, and might even get a robber or gang member off the street before something worse happens.

Repealing our gun law, and further repealing the District's local legislative authority, has devastating repercussions for public safety. It will be harder to arrest chronic criminals, because police will no longer be able to charge them with possessing unregistered weapons. It will be harder for police to trace guns used in crimes, because there will be no registration system. It will be harder for Chief Lanier to be proactive about gun violence, because federal law only records gun information such as ballistics *after* a crime has occurred.

Residents of the District of Columbia should not have to choose between representation and public safety. It's disgraceful that Congress would suggest we gain a vote in the House in return for losing local governance over gun violence.

Accepting this amendment would be a Faustian bargain.

The DC Council and the region have called for a clean bill. Now more than ever, we must stand up and fight for a vote in Congress as well as fend off this blatant attack on our Home Rule charter. There must be no gun amendment.

Constituent Services Corner

Recently, a former District resident called Councilmember Mendelson's office troubled she'd received a bill from the Office of Tax and Revenue in excess of \$ 5,770.50 associated with the sale of her home in 2005. The bill had continuously accrued since 2005 because OTR was reportedly unable reach by mail the former property owner.

Our office swiftly contacted OTR and requested a review of the billing sequences since 2005 as well as their notification efforts. We aimed to determine whether OTR's fees were appropriately applied.

As a result of our intervention, a favorable disposition letter was sent to the former homeowner, saving her thousands of dollars in overcharges.

Just because you might leave the District, it doesn't mean the District should leave you. Give Councilmember Mendelson's office a call, you've still got a friend in DC.

From the Chief of Police

The following is from March 9th testimony before the Committee on Public Safety and the Judiciary by Chief Cathy Lanier:

“At the end of 2008 violent crime in the District was down 5 percent District-wide, and gun crimes showed double digit reductions across the board, including a 12 percent reduction in robberies with guns and 14 percent reduction in assaults with guns. In fact, there were fewer gun crimes in the summer of 2008 than in any summer since at least 2003.

“...Our increased enforcement efforts in 2008 netted a 10 percent increase in the number of illegal guns recovered and more than 700 more arrests than in 2007.

“...While we did experience an increase of 5 homicides in calendar year 2008 it is important to note that 10 of those homicides actually occurred in a previous year but were carried on the 2008 stats in accordance with national FBI standards. To put things in perspective, if you removed all of the prior year homicides carried on our yearly totals, there was actually one less murder in calendar year 2008 compared to 2007.

“...we have also done a good job closing cases by quickly apprehending offenders that do commit crime. As you will see from our high closure rates that stand well above the national average, our homicide unit ended with a record high closure rate of 75 percent. This is the highest homicide closure rate we have had in more than 27 years and more than 20 percent above the average for comparably sized US cities.”

Closing cases is especially important. Research has shown repeatedly that the likelihood of arrest and certainty of punishment are the greatest deterrents to crime.

Mendelson Holds Town Halls, More to Come

Phil has already held five town hall meetings on taxes and community concerns, and will hold one more before the April 1st deadline to appeal your taxes. We also recently announced a round of Public Safety Community Meetings to address issues of importance in your neighborhood. Below is a list of the latest community meetings. We hope to see you in the neighborhood!

Upcoming Community Meetings

- March 31st at 6:30pm - True Reformer Bldg. - 1200 U, NW
- April 7th at 7:00pm - Wash. Highlands Library - 115 Atlantic, SW
- April 13th at 6:30 PM - Kennedy Rec. Center - 1401 7th, NW
- April 21st at 7:00 PM - MPD 6th District H.Q. - 100 42nd, NE



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Upcoming Hearings of the Judiciary Committee

March 26th, 10:00am, 5th Fl. Chamber
Budget Oversight Hearing on:

- Department of Corrections
- Office of Unified Communications
- Office of the Chief Medical Examiner
- Office of the Attorney General

March 27th, 1:00pm, Rm. 123
Joint Public Hearing on Bill 18-83, the
“Metropolitan Police Department Subpoena Limi-
tation Amendment Act of 2009”

March 30th, 11:00am, Rm. 123
Public Hearing on Bill 18-115, the “Fire &
Police Disciplinary Action Procedure Amendment
Act of 2009”

April 1st, 10:00am, Rm. 412
Budget Oversight Hearing on:

- Fire & Emergency Medical Services
- Office of Administrative Hearings
- Office of Police Complaints
- Metropolitan Police Department
- Forensics Laboratory

May 18th, 10:30am, Rm. 412
Continuation of a Public Hearing on Bills:
18-138, the “Omnibus Anti-Crime Amendment
Act of 2009” and 18-151, the “Public Safety &
Justice Amendments Act of 2009”

Please contact the Committee at
(202) 724-7808 for more information.