

TYRANNY IN THE NATION'S CAPITOL

By Larry Pratt
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Sic Semper Tyrannis. I read that Latin phrase in the seal of the stationery the Commonwealth of Virginia issued me shortly after I was sworn in as a member of the General Assembly. It was also on my state-issued business cards identifying me as a member of the House of Delegates. Of course, I knew it was on the state flag, as it is prominently displayed on state-owned cars. However, it was only recently that I have come to understand the powerful imagery on the seal, and its relevance to one of my great passions -- the Second Amendment.

Carefully chosen in May 1776 by the newly established Commonwealth of Virginia, these words -- Thus Always to Tyrants -- still accentuate the state seal's portrayal of a female figure armed with her long spear and sheathed sword, her triumphant foot resting on the neck of the prostrate body of a male in armor.

Symbolically, the Virginia seal captures the true meaning of the Second Amendment. The woman -- armed with a military weapon of her day and brandishing her sword of authority -- personifies "the right of the people to keep and bear arms" to secure a "free State."

No doubt the dethroned ruler lying underfoot regretted his failure to disarm the lady of her spear, to the "reasonable" end of preserving the public safety. Indeed, had King George III acted more quickly to control the American colonists' muskets, blunderbusses, and other weapons suitable to resist the English military, there would be no United States of America.

Today, the American people are told that times have changed. The weaponry of warfare is too dangerous to be left in the hands of the people. But the Second Amendment, like the First Amendment, was placed in the Constitution not to be abandoned because government officials have now found it unfit for "the needs of the moment," as the Oregon Supreme Court warned in 1980.

Rather, the Second Amendment protects the right of the people to possess such firearms which are comparable to the ones brandished by today's military. This was the very point made by the D.C. Court of Appeals when it ruled against the D.C. government's 30 year old gun ban. The court ruled in *DC v. Heller* that modern day military firearms are the "lineal descendant[s] of ... founding-era weapon[s]." Hence the right to possess a machinegun, a direct descendant of the 18th century blunderbuss, is protected by the Second Amendment -- just as surely as the Internet, a direct descendant of the printing press, is protected by the First Amendment.



And the freedom protected in the Second Amendment is a right belonging, without discrimination, to all of America's citizens. This right is not one to be parceled out by the government to favored classes, such as to ex-cops and to employees of private security companies -- something which the D.C. Council has done with its almost total ban on handguns in the nation's capitol.

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As usual, the Founders got it right, and it should be the paramount duty of their successors in governmental office not to be creative or pragmatic, but to be faithful in preserving their legacy to us -- the greatest component of which is the Constitution and its precious Second Amendment.

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