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Reciprocity for Concealed Carry

by Scott McPherson

No American would for one moment consider the possibility that, once issued a driver's license by his state of residence, he should not then be free to drive in another state. Thus, your driver's license is valid in Virginia, even if you live in Hawaii; your marriage license and birth certificate and property titles must be respected, regardless of where in the United States you may be at any given moment.

Unfortunately, however, the states fail to show a similar respect for licenses and permits issued by other states to residents respecting their right to carry a concealed weapon (CCW), specifically a handgun. Since the late 1970s, more and more states have been liberalizing their laws and making it easier for residents to carry a concealed weapon, to the point that about 40 states now have such laws. The legislatures of some states have been acting in good faith to establish "reciprocity" with other states, but for all intents and purposes the law-abiding gun carrier finds his ability to defend himself ending at the state line. If the same were true of driver's licenses, Americans would be hollering all the way to Washington, D.C.

For years Rep. Ron Paul (R-Tex.) has been introducing national reciprocity-related legislation in Congress, but to no avail. Some of his colleagues are now getting on board, and in this session Sen. John Thune (R-S.D.) and Sen. David Vitter (R-La.) offered an amendment to a defense bill that would require states to respect CCW licenses issued in other states. The amendment failed by two votes.

For years anti-gun types have been desperately trying to equate firearms and automobiles. Their logic is as follows: persons must have a license to operate a motor vehicle — a huge responsibility — therefore people should need a license to own a gun — another huge responsibility. They point to the large number of homicides committed in this country by people with guns — about 10,000 to 15,000 murders per year — and from that data conclude that licensing gun owners would somehow make the nation a safer place.

Should we expect as few gun-related homicides under such a regime as car-related deaths? In 2008, more than 43,000 people died in car accidents, virtually all of which involved licensed

drivers. We should actually expect gun-related homicides to *increase* with licensing! But I digress.

Automobiles are potentially dangerous, so we are told that only licensed operators should be able to drive them. (I don't agree with the latter point any more than I believe that only licensed people should be able to bear arms, but I will indulge the view for the sake of this discussion.) But once a state-issued driver's license is granted, there is no longer any question of your freedom to drive in another state. It would seem that having a state-issued license to carry a concealed handgun would address this concern as it relates to gun-carriers.

Is there any reason to believe that states are playing a less-than-vigilant role in the issuance of CCW licenses? If the number of CCW licensees charged with gun-related crimes in any given year is any indication — and that number is virtually nil — then we should logically conclude that states are doing a far *worse* job guaranteeing that car drivers are competent. Still you are free to drive, but not carry a handgun to protect yourself or your family, outside of your home state. That's just not right.

Two states, Vermont and Alaska, have no licensing requirement at all for carrying a concealed weapon. Anyone who wants to carry a handgun, even nonresidents, may do so, and both have crime rates among the lowest in the country. Rather than restricting Americans' freedom to carry a handgun for self-defense, other states should follow their example. Or at the very least, they ought to honor the concealed-carry permits issued by other states.

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