

DEBATE OVER PUBLIC GUN INFORMATION UNDERMINES EXCUSE FOR GUNS

I'm agnostic about but very interested in the uproar over the publication of people in the NY suburbs who have permits to own handguns. It does infringe on the privacy of people who are engaging in a protected activity. But at the same time, that activity exposes others to risks they have an interest in knowing about.

Ultimately, I compare it to websites that allow you to search political donations by address. Political donations are protected by the First Amendment. But no one I know has objected to the publication of it by neighborhood (when I still lived in Ann Arbor, I discovered there was a guy whose last name was Koch who was maxing out donations he apparently couldn't afford—given his modest house—to Republicans, right in the middle of my otherwise entirely Democratic neighborhood). Similarly, in most cases, petition signers' names can be publicly released. If your political donations can be made public, why not your gun permit?

All that said, I'm amused by the excuses gun owners make, particularly that public records of gun ownership will make those permit holders the target for thieves.

“Publishing gun owners' names makes them targets for theft or public ridicule. It is journalistic arrogance to abuse public record privilege, just as it is to air 911 calls for no reason or to publish the home addresses of police or judges without cause,” Al Tompkins, a Poynter senior faculty member, said in a statement Wednesday. “Unwarranted publishing of the names of permitted owners just encourages gun owners to

skip the permitting.”

If I'm a thief, I'm going to selectively rob the houses where I know the owner is likely to be armed, rather than the reverse? Really? So guns are only a protection against crimes in schools, but not in a home?

It makes no sense.

One other thing that makes no sense? The same people who railed against publishing gun permit information on Twitter immediately got silent when yesterday's debate on FISA started up.

So apparently permitting the government to collect all of your communications is less intrusive than letting your neighbors know you're armed?

Again, I see both sides of this debate and am rather more interested in what the debate says about our attitude toward guns. But thus far, it has seemed entirely inconsistent with everything else gun owners say about their guns.