



Written by [James Heiser](#) on September 1, 2009

USA Today Misses Mark on Gun Rights

In an August 31 editorial, the editors of the USA Today have entered the debate over the presence of firearms at political protests with a seemingly-reasonable point of view: Use common sense. In the words of the editorial: "Carrying guns openly outside presidential events may be legal in many states, but it sure isn't smart."

Undeniably, many staunch defenders of the constitutional right to keep and bear arms cringed at the decision of some gun rights activists to openly carry guns to anti-Obama protests. Americans have a long track record of having as hard a time understanding the difference between those actions which are "legal" and those which are "smart" as they do between those actions which are "legal" and those which are "moral." Certainly there is nothing immoral about exercising one's legal rights in this circumstance, but the visible presence of guns at rallies has legitimately raised the question of how *smart* it is to choose such a display.



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However, one area where the *USA Today* editorial falls woefully short is in confronting the way in which various media outlets have grossly distorted the fact concerning the presence of guns at various rallies. The Second Amendment Foundation has [accused MSNBC of playing racial politics](#) with the rallies, claiming that the network deliberately concealed the fact that the man who carried an AR-15 rifle at the Phoenix rally is an African-American, even as they raised the accusation that such "gun-toting" Americans who opposed President Obama are racists. It is not enough for the *USA Today* to acknowledge, "Those on the left decried the incidents, many suggesting that anyone who would carry a gun to a presidential event must be nuts, potentially violent or both."

The problem is that some members of the media were more than ready to provide precisely such an interpretation.

Furthermore, the *USA Today* editorial is rather one sided in its evaluation of the "mood" at such protests:

For starters, the mood at some of this summer's health care town hall meetings has been disturbing enough without the addition of weapons. Some have degenerated into furious shouting matches. Opponents of reform have whipped up anger. A few protesters outside have carried signs likening President Obama to Hitler. No good can come from adding weapons to the mix.



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Rather than blaming Americans who are outraged by some elected officials' display of contempt for the citizens who elected them, why not ask whether President Obama and the Congress are to blame for needlessly terrifying the American public and threatening their civil liberties with schemes to collectivize massive portions of the economy? Why not mention the anger and vitriol which the busloads of Obamaniacs are spewing at citizens who simply want to ask their congressman a question? What about the chilling effect of a congressman demanding that a resident of his district show the equivalent of his 'papers' before being allowed to ask a question?

And, of course, the *USA Today* editors chose to play the "assassination" card:

And there's this. In the week that Sen. Edward Kennedy was laid to rest — the only Kennedy brother to die of natural causes — it's tough to argue that bringing a gun to political events is just a benign act of protest. It's playing with fire in a nation where so many political figures have been killed or maimed by bullets.

This is arguably the most nonsensical point raised in the entire editorial. Neither President Kennedy nor Senator Robert Kennedy were killed by protesters; neither of the despicable men involved in the assassinations can be compared to the lawful protesters in any way. Certainly the political views of Lee Harvey Oswald and Sirhan Sirhan are diametrically opposed to those of the men and women legally, peacefully protesting against President Obama. Furthermore, in neither situation was the assassination a result of a protest that somehow got out of control, or a situation where the legal possession of a firearm got "out of control." The record of both assassinations is one of clear premeditation of violence and concealment of the weapon. In point of fact, one might wonder whether any assassination of a nationally-known political figure in our nation's history occurred in the circumstances which seem to so terrify the editors of the *USA Today*.

The editors of the *USA Today* are right to appeal to "common sense," but they seem to abandon common sense as they continue the editorial, and instead result to pulling lines from the left-wing "spin" of the event. Patriotic American would benefit from demonstrating prudence in the exercise of their rights — but there is a world of difference between a need to exercise better judgment at rallies, and a smear campaign aimed at besmirching the characters of law-abiding American citizens.

— Photo of former Rep. Bob Barr (Ga.), at podium, defending gun rights: AP Images



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