

Court decision on guns gets mixed reception

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Mark Campbell's gun shop was in celebration Thursday.

There was no cake or champagne. But friends and customers at Mid America Arms in Affton were delighted with the Supreme Court's decision to strike down a law banning handguns in Washington.

"The pro-gun community is pretty ecstatic," Campbell said. "There's a lot of people talking about it." Although the ruling will have no immediate affect in Missouri, already considered one of the more gun-friendly states, some say the decision will swing the debate toward personal rights.

"I'm cautiously optimistic," said Greg Jeffery, a lobbyist with the Missourians for Personal Safety.

The decision deflated those who had been working for tougher gun laws.

"Instead of protecting the gun itself, we should be looking at ways to protect human lives," complained Stacey Newman, executive director of the Missouri Women's Coalition. She said the decision does nothing to promote safety for people, especially children.

Tom Mannard, executive director of the Illinois Council Against Handgun Violence, called the ruling "disappointing, but not surprising."

In Illinois, five municipalities with local handgun bans — Chicago and four suburbs — were trying to assess the impact. Chicago Mayor Richard Daley called it "a very frightening decision" that could mean more violence and higher costs for policing and medical care.

Pierce Daniel Smith, a firearms instructor at Bull's Eye, an indoor range in St. Louis, said, "We are not surprised that five justices supported unconditionally our right to keep and bear arms. We are concerned that four felt otherwise."

Jeffery said there are still concerns. He said the decision upholds the right to have a gun at home but does not address laws permitting concealed carry or keeping a firearm in a car. Those are allowed with restrictions by Missouri but not in Illinois.

There were no bans on guns in homes in downstate Illinois, so the decision seems to have little effect there. Still, "It's a moral victory for us," said Steven King, owner of the Belleville Indoor Shooting Range.

It was unclear how a portion of the ruling, overturning a requirement for locks on guns in Washington, affects Missouri and Illinois. Neither mandates locks, but Illinois requires that guns be kept secure in homes with children and dealers offer trigger locks with gun sales.

MISSOURI LEGISLATION

The victory for the pro-gun community was punctuated in Missouri on Thursday by Gov. Matt Blunt signing legislation to seal records of people with a permit to carry concealed weapons, to eliminate a waiting period for new residents with permits from other states and to protect gun ranges from local anti-noise ordinances.

Jeff Mardis, who was at Bull's Eye on Thursday for target practice, said he likes to hunt but has a different reason to own a handgun: "Protection is No. 1."

Pointing out that Washington remained a violent city despite the tight limit on handgun ownership, Mardis said, "The effect is you disarm honest citizens who might come to your aid."

The Associated Press provided information for this report.