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No. 93723-1

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**COURT OF APPEALS
DIVISION I
OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON**

PHILIP WATSON, an Individual, et al.,

Appellants,

v.

CITY OF SEATTLE, a Municipality, et al.,

Respondents.

**BRIEF OF AMICI CURIAE
CERTAIN WASHINGTON LEGISLATORS**

Todd C. Hayes, WSBA No. 26361

HARPER | HAYES PLLC
One Union Square
600 University Street, Suite 2420
Seattle, Washington 98101
Telephone: 206.340.8010
Facsimile: 206.260.2852

Attorneys for Certain Washington Legislators

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PAGE

I. INTRODUCTION 1

II. ARGUMENT 1

III. CONCLUSION 11

TABLE OF AUTHORITIES

PAGE

Cases

Cherry v. Municipality of Metro. Seattle, 116 Wn.2d 794,
808 P.2d 746 (1991)..... 2

Chan v. City of Seattle, 164 Wn. App. 549, 265 P.3d 169 (2011) 2, 5

City of Seattle v. Ballsmider, 71 Wn. App. 159,
856 P.2d 1113 (1993)..... 8, 9

Fed. Land Bank of St. Paul v. Bismarck Lumber Co., 314 U.S. 95,
62 S. Ct. 1, 86 L. Ed. 65 (1941)..... 5

Okeson v. City of Seattle, 150 Wn.2d 540, 78 P.3d 1279 (2003)..... 11

P. Lorillard Co. v. City of Seattle, 8 Wn. App. 510,
507 P.2d 1212 (1973)..... 4

Second Amendment Found. v. City of Renton, 35 Wn. App. 583,
668 P.2d 596 (1983)..... 2, 3

Rivard v. State, 168 Wn.2d 775, 231 P.3d 186 (2010)..... 7

Statutes

RCW 9.41.290 *passim*

RCW 9.41.300 *passim*

RCW Chapter 9.41 2, 3, 6

RCW 35.22.280(32)..... 10, 11

Other Authorities

1983 Op. Att’y Gen. No. 14 (September 22, 1983)..... 3, 4

2008 Op. Att’y Gen. No. 8 (October 13, 2008)..... 5

BLACK’S LAW DICTIONARY (4th ed. 1951)..... 7

Laws of 1983, ch. 232, § 12..... 2, 3

Laws of 1985, ch. 428, § 1 5

SMC 5.55.060. 6

WEBSTER’S NEW WORLD ROGET’S A-Z THESAURUS (1999)..... 7

I. INTRODUCTION

The Washington Legislature has repeatedly amended RCW 9.41.290 to make it clear that local governments cannot pass *any* law regarding firearms without specific authorization from the state. Thus, whether Ordinance 124833 constitutes a “regulation” or a “tax” is ultimately irrelevant—the state did not “specifically authorize” Seattle to enact the Ordinance, so it violates RCW 9.41.290. Accordingly, the Ordinance is preempted, and this Court should invalidate it.

II. ARGUMENT

The current version of RCW 9.41.290 contains the broadest preemption language possible—“fully occupies” and “entire field”:

The state of Washington hereby fully occupies and preempts the entire field of firearms regulation within the boundaries of the state, including the registration, licensing, possession, purchase, sale, acquisition, transfer, discharge, and transportation of firearms, or any other element relating to firearms or parts thereof, including ammunition and reloader components. Cities, towns, and counties or other municipalities may enact only those laws and ordinances relating to firearms that are specifically authorized by state law, as in RCW 9.41.300, and are consistent with this chapter. Such local ordinances shall have the same penalty as provided for by state law. Local laws and ordinances that are inconsistent with, more restrictive than, or exceed the requirements of state law shall not be enacted and are preempted and repealed, regardless of the nature of the code, charter, or home rule status of such city, town, county, or municipality.

RCW 9.41.290.

As the drafting history of RCW 9.41.290 makes clear, the current version of the statute was enacted to prevent local governments from adopting *any* firearms law that the Legislature had not expressly authorized. The goal was not simply to prohibit local laws that were inconsistent with those of the state; the aim was to preclude local laws that the Legislature had not explicitly told local governments they could adopt.

Originally, the statute just barred conflicting laws:

In 1983, the legislature enacted chapter 9.41 RCW to prevent municipalities from adopting inconsistent laws and ordinances regulating firearms. Laws of 1983, ch. 232, § 12; [Cherry v. Municipality of Metro. Seattle, 116 Wn.2d 794, 801, 808 P.2d 746 (1991)]. Former RCW 9.41.290 provides, in pertinent part:

Cities, towns, and counties may enact only those laws and ordinances relating to firearms that are consistent with this chapter. Local laws and ordinances that are inconsistent with, more restrictive than, or exceed the requirements of state law shall not be enacted.

Chan v. City of Seattle, 164 Wn. App. 549, 552, 265 P.3d 169 (2011)
(quoting Laws of 1983, ch. 232, § 12).

That same year, this Court decided Second Amendment Found. v. City of Renton, 35 Wn. App. 583, 668 P.2d 596 (1983). One of the issues in that case was whether RCW Chapter 9.41 preempted an ordinance that barred possession of firearms where alcohol was sold by the drink. The Court held that RCW Chapter 9.41—which did not yet contain

RCW 9.41.290—did not “indicate[] an intention to preempt municipal regulation in all areas of gun control,” so the ordinance was not preempted. *See Second Amendment Found.*, 35 Wn. App. at 588. In a footnote, the Court explained that the 1983 version of RCW 9.41.290—which had just been enacted—would not have altered its decision:

Since oral argument in this case, the legislature added a new section to RCW ch. 9.41, to be effective July 24, 1983. Laws of 1983, ch. 232, § 12. This provision prohibits the enactment of local ordinances inconsistent with the requirements of RCW Ch. 9.41. It does not militate against the result reached here.

Second Amendment Found., 35 Wn. App. 583, 588 n.3.

A month after this Court decided Second Amendment Found., the Attorney General’s office issued a formal Opinion addressing the case. *See* 1983 Op. Att’y Gen. No. 14 (September 22, 1983).¹ The Attorney General explained that under the version of RCW 9.41.290 then in effect, cities would be able to enact firearms laws, as long as they weren’t inconsistent with those of the state. According to the Attorney General, if the Legislature wanted to limit local “actions” and “interference” regarding firearms—not just “regulations”—the Legislature should amend RCW 9.41.290 to add phrases like “preempt” and “occupies the field”:

¹ The September 22, 1983 Opinion amends a July 28, 1983 Opinion regarding Laws of 1983, ch. 232, § 12.

[P]reemption indicates a complete take-over of a field of activity to the exclusion of *all local actions, regulations or interference*—and thus, if that is the intention of the legislature, the best and most effective way to manifest that intent would be to use the term “preemption” or “occupies the field” or similar terms. *See, P. Lorillard Co. v. City of Seattle*, 8 Wn. App. 510, 507 P.2d 1212 (1973). Neither term, however, was used in the case of § 12 of [chapter 232, Laws of 1983].

1983 Op. Att’y Gen. No. 14 (September 23, 1983) (emphasis added).

Thus, the Legislature understood in 1983—based on what the then-Attorney General was telling it—that adding “preemption” and “occupies the field” to RCW 9.41.290 would preclude all “local actions” and “interference” by local governments, not just “regulations.”

Two years later, the Legislature amended RCW 9.41.290, adding language even stronger than what the Attorney General had recommended—clarifying that the state was “*fully occup[ying]*” and “*preempt[ing] the entire*” field:

The state of Washington hereby fully occupies and preempts the entire field of firearms regulation within the boundaries of the state, including the registration, licensing, possession, purchase, sale, acquisition, transfer, discharge, and transportation of firearms, or any other element relating to firearms or parts thereof, including ammunition and reloader components. Cities, towns, and counties or other municipalities may enact only those laws and ordinances relating to firearms that are specifically authorized by state law and are consistent with this chapter. Such local ordinances shall have the same or lesser penalty as provided for by state law. Local laws and ordinances that are inconsistent with, more restrictive than, or exceed the

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775, 783, 231 P.3d 186 (2010) (“[W]e interpret a statute to give effect to all language, so as to render no portion meaningless or superfluous.”).

This interpretation is also consistent with the phrase “as in RCW 9.41.300.” RCW 9.41.290 didn’t originally contain that phrase—the Legislature added it in 1994 after this Court’s decision in City of Seattle v. Ballsmider, 71 Wn. App. 159, 856 P.2d 1113 (1993). Before Ballsmider, RCW 9.41.290 simply stated, “Cities . . . may enact only those laws and ordinances relating to firearms that are specifically authorized by state law” See Ballsmider, 71 Wn. App. at 161-62. Also, RCW 9.41.300 started with the phrase, “Notwithstanding RCW 9.41.290” Ballsmider, 71 Wn. App. at 162.

Seattle had passed a rule regarding firearms that was within the scope of RCW 9.41.300, but imposed a greater penalty than under state law. The appellant in Ballsmider argued that RCW 9.41.290 preempted the rule because the rule was inconsistent with state law. The City countered that the word “notwithstanding” in RCW 9.41.300 meant the City could pass laws about subjects in that statute, even if they contradicted state law. This Court agreed:

The definition of “notwithstanding” is “in spite of,” which in turn is defined as “in defiance of, *regardless of*.” Thus, the effect of “notwithstanding RCW 9.41.290” is that the preemption statute and its restrictions, including its penalty restrictions, are to be disregarded and have

absolutely no bearing on laws enacted pursuant to RCW 9.41.300(2)(a).

Ballsmider, 71 Wn. App. at 162-63.

The next year, the Legislature deleted the phrase “notwithstanding RCW 9.41.290” from RCW 9.41.300. It also amended RCW 9.41.290, adding, “as in RCW 9.41.300” after “specifically authorized by state law”: “Cities . . . may enact only those laws and ordinances relating to firearms that are specifically authorized by state law, as in RCW 9.41.300”

The timing of these amendments makes their plain language even clearer. RCW 9.41.300 is not an exception to RCW 9.41.290. Statutes like RCW 9.41.300—ones that expressly mention “firearms”—are the sole authority by which a local government can enact a law regarding firearms. A local government can’t enact a firearms law unless a statute specifically authorizes it in the kind of way that RCW 9.41.300 does.

RCW 9.41.300 expressly mentions “firearms”—and expressly states that local governments may adopt certain kinds of *firearms* laws:

- (2) Cities, towns, counties, and other municipalities may enact laws and ordinances:
 - (a) Restricting the discharge of *firearms* in . . . ; and
 - (b) Restricting the possession of *firearms* in . . . , except that
- (3)(a) Cities, towns, and counties may enact ordinances restricting the areas in their respective jurisdictions in which *firearms* may be sold

(b) Cities, towns, and counties may restrict the location of a business selling firearms to

RCW 9.41.300 (emphasis added).

By contrast, RCW 35.22.280(32)—the statute that the City claims grants it authority to enact the Ordinance—doesn't even mention "firearms." That law doesn't "specifically authorize[]" a local government to act "*as in RCW 9.41.300.*" It *generally* authorizes activity, in a manner nothing like RCW 9.41.300.

Lastly, the Ordinance violates the fourth sentence of RCW 9.41.290 because Seattle's tax on gun buyers now exceeds the requirements of state law: "Local laws and ordinances that are inconsistent with, more restrictive than, or exceed the requirements of state law shall not be enacted and are preempted and repealed . . ." RCW 9.41.290. Significantly, this sentence has three subparts, and they're phrased in the disjunctive. An ordinance need not be "inconsistent" with or "more restrictive" than state law—it's enough that it requires more than what state law requires. Also, like the second sentence of RCW 9.41.290, the fourth sentence refers to "laws" and "ordinances" generally—not just laws that "regulate."

State law doesn't impose a separate tax on guns. The "requirements of state law" are to simply pay whatever sales tax applies.

Thus, the requirement that Seattle gun buyers pay an additional per-gun and per-round tax for firearms and ammunition “exceed[s] the requirements of state law.”³

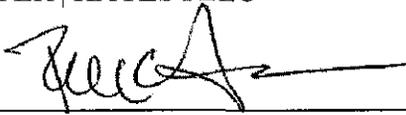
III. CONCLUSION

The drafting history of RCW 9.41.290 confirms its plain language: the Legislature intended to fully preempt the entire field of firearms laws. A local government cannot enact a firearms law unless the Legislature has “specifically” authorized it “as in RCW 9.41.300”—*i.e.*, with a law that expressly mentions firearms and expressly states that the local government can pass the firearms law. RCW 35.22.280(32) doesn’t do that. Accordingly, the City was not specifically authorized to tax guns. The Ordinance is preempted and this Court should invalidate it.

DATED this 18th day of July, 2016.

HARPER | HAYES PLLC

By: _____


Todd C. Hayes, WSBA No. 26361
Attorneys for Certain Washington Legislators

³ Amici agree with Appellants that the Ordinance also violates the City’s taxing authority. Under the City’s reasoning, the ordinance in Okeson v. City of Seattle, 150 Wn.2d 540, 78 P.3d 1279 (2003), would have been acceptable because the rate it imposed alone—as opposed to the rate that resulted from the combination of the ordinance and any already-existing taxes—did not exceed six percent. The Supreme Court didn’t agree with that strained interpretation. Seattle cannot circumvent RCW 35.21.710 by imposing a greater-than-.00215 rate tax using two ordinances, as opposed to one.

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

The undersigned certifies that on *Monday, July 18, 2016*, I caused and true and correct copy of this document to be delivered in the manner indicated to the following parties:

VIA E-MAIL AND US MAIL

Steven W. Fogg
David B. Edwards
Corr Cronin Michelson
Baumgardner Fogg & Moore LLP
1001 Fourth Avenue, Suite 3900
Seattle, WA 98154
sfogg@correronin.com
dedwards@correronin.com

William F. Abrams
Laurie Edelstein
David H. Kwasniewski
Steptoe & Johnson LLP
1891 Page Mill Road, Suite 200
Palo Alto, CA 94304
wabrams@steptoe.com
ledelstein@steptoe.com
sjackel@steptoe.com
dkwasniewski@steptoe.com

Peter S. Holmes
Kent C. Meyer
Carlton W.M. Seu
Seattle City Attorney's Office
701 Fifth Avenue, Suite 2050
Seattle, WA 98104
kent.meyer@seattle.gov
carlton.seu@seattle.gov

Jeffrey I. Tilden
Franklin D. Cordell
Gordon Tilden Thomas & Cordell LLP
1001 Fourth Avenue, Suite 4000
Seattle, WA 98154
jtilden@gordontilden.com
fcordell@gordontilden.com

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DATED this 18th day of July, 2016.

Nicole Plouf

Nicole Plouf