

## TAKE TWO BULLETS & CALL ME IN THE MORNING



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MATTHEW Carmel has an answer for some of government's wackiest policies: the "prescription handgun."

OK, maybe Carmel - a firearms instructor and a friend of mine - wasn't *looking* to expose the silliness when he designed a pistol for the elderly and disabled. But he sure did run across some weirdness when the Food and Drug Administration briefly registered the gun as a "medical device," potentially qualifying for coverage under private or government insurance.

The agency reversed course and squashed that idea Monday. But Carmel may still have come out a winner.

Carmel's gizmo (the Palm Pistol) resembles a stubby, sideways letter "T." It holds just a single round, and you fire it by depressing a trigger button on top with your thumb. That design, he says, makes it easier for seniors, folks with **arthritis** and other disabilities to load, aim and shoot. Carmel hoped to market it in outlets aimed at such people. But would pitching it as especially useful to the disabled, etc., break any laws? He figured he'd better make sure - so he asked the FDA.

The bureaucrats advised him to see if the gun qualified as a medical device - and later actually notified him that it did.

Soon he had visions of sales boosted by Medicare or other health coverage.

And why not? For years, lawmakers have been requiring reimbursements for an ever-expanding universe of marginal treatments - fertility drugs, dubious kinds of counseling, "alternative medicine" and other non-traditional "health care."

In Albany, bills that force insurers to offer such coverage are perennials. (Just a few years ago, one bill would've mandated insurance for a procedure in which an herb is burned near a pregnant woman's small toe to reposition the fetus, Mercifully, the measure failed.)

Why is calling a special gun a "medical device" any zanier than extending Medicaid (a safety net for the *poor*) to more than one in every three people, including many in the middle class, as New York City has done?

OK, a gun can't lower cholesterol, improve mobility or do anything else traditionally thought of as "health care." But, as Carmel notes, it can save lives during an attack - particularly among the elderly and disabled, who "suffer a disproportionate share of being victims of a crime." Saving lives is what "health care" is all about.

His target customers, he says, are "targeted by criminals precisely because they are vulnerable. And I find it amazing that the government wouldn't want to support the weak and vulnerable segments of our society."

That may be a stretch. But Carmel's argument points up the folly and inconsistencies in government health-care mandates. Not to mention the hypocrisy of liberals who push those mandates but despise guns - even if they may be an important aid to vulnerable seniors and others.

The happy ending? The story drew tremendous publicity. Two separate Fox News shows did segments on the Palm Pistol, and articles about it ran worldwide.

Now, Carmel says, inquiries from seniors and folks with disabilities are pouring in; he'll soon have enough funding to start manufacturing the gun.

His buyers will have to reach into their own pocket, of course - he's asking \$300; those who can't afford it will be out of luck.

Still, he can be proud to have scored a point against those who want to "universalize" medicine - even the kind that's not exactly medicine.

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