



Limited Open Carry Comes to Oklahoma

On Thursday of this week, the state of Oklahoma will take an important step on the slow return to a constitutional right to keep and bear arms. A new law comes into effect on November 1 that allows those citizens who have concealed carry permits to openly carry a firearm.

Although the constitution of these United States does not recognize any restrictions on the right of citizens to possess those means necessary for their self-defense, many state and local governments have endeavored to restrict the free exercise of such rights either through a deliberate ban, or by restriction and regulation. [According to a map available at OpenCarry.org](#), Oklahoma is one of only seven states that does not permit “open carry” (that is, open possession of a holstered or otherwise secured firearm). The District of Columbia also forbids open carry.



The new law in Oklahoma does not adhere to the full measure of liberty enunciated in the federal constitution: rather than recognizing that all citizens have such a right, the law limits the exercise of this right to citizens who have procured a state-issued permit for concealed carry. At present, 141,000 state residents have such a permit. In a state of [nearly 3.8 million](#) people, of whom approximately 2.85 million are 18 years of age or older (and thus are eligible to vote for example). Thus, only five percent of the population of Oklahoma is even considered eligible legally to openly carry a firearm.

According to [statistics compiled by the Bureau of Justice](#), a total of only 8,639 “sworn personnel” serve in various state and local law enforcement agencies in the state of Oklahoma. And, as self-defense advocates are quick to point out, [“When seconds count, the police are only minutes away.”](#) And the people neither desire, nor can they afford, a police presence capable of deterring crime in all places at all times. According to self-defense advocates, the exercise of open carry by law-abiding citizens is the most effective deterrent to crime. A recent incident in Oklahoma in which it was necessary for a 12-year-old girl to [shoot an alleged burglar](#) highlights the dangers that threaten an unarmed populace.

The media, however, have acted as if the legal changes in Oklahoma will have an effect somewhat similar to a natural disaster such as alleged “global warming.” For example, the *New York Times* ran the headline, [“Oklahomans Prepare for New Law That Will Make Guns a Common Sight,”](#) and the Associated Press sounded a similar theme of “preparation”: [“Okla. prepares for open carrying of firearms.”](#) For advocates of those liberties enunciated in the second amendment, there is often something galling about the patronizing tones which those who make their living via the first amendment direct toward those who desire to exercise other liberties. For the *New York Times*, this meant invoking the “concern and unease” of a vague group of individuals opposed to the new law:



Written by [James Heiser](#) on October 31, 2012

In Oklahoma, some police officials, merchants and residents have expressed varying levels of concern and unease with the law. In 2010, a similar bill was vetoed by the governor at the time, Brad Henry, a Democrat, in part based on law enforcement concerns that such a law would make it difficult for officers to sort out the good guys from the bad guys at a crime scene. This year, the bill was signed into law in May by Gov. Mary Fallin, a Republican and a gun owner.

Sadly, under the laws previously in place, it may well have been easy for police to “sort out” crime scenes by observing that the innocent victims were dead, and the criminals had fled the scene. For those who have been trained for concealed carry, the etiquette of interactions with the police is something that has been drilled into permit applicants in classes.

Although the bill passed the Oklahoma senate by [a vote of 33-10](#), AP’s Sean Murphy sought out the opinion of one member of the state senate who opposed the new law:

Not everyone in Oklahoma is eager to see people carrying weapons in public. State Sen. Jim Wilson opposed the bill and said it sends a negative message to the rest of the country.

“The only reason to openly carry is for intimidation or to impress the girls,” said Wilson (D-Tahlequah). “It makes Oklahoma look silly with all these cowboys running around with guns. And there’s just no data that shows being armed helps at all with public safety.”

In fact, Wilson vocalized his concerns about Oklahoma’s ‘image problems’ in [an article](#) for *Tulsa World* back in May of this year: “I think it is bad for economic development. Oklahoma already has a problem reputation, and this is not going to help it.” And Wilson’s views are clearly in line with the *New York Times*, which opined: “The new law has illustrated the ways in which the state’s image as a bastion of rugged outdoorsmen and gun-toting cowboys is as much fact as it is fiction.”

One wonders how many victims of unlicensed guns in the hands of criminals in New York City might feel about having such “gun-toting cowboys” come to their defense. In the meantime, critics might note that there is nothing stopping Sen. Wilson may from changing his residence to a state more in keeping with his image concerns.

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