



When a Colt .45 Isn't Just on the Bar Menu

Despite the best efforts of gun-control organizations, Americans are gaining more and more freedom to keep and bear arms. Forty-eight states now have laws allowing citizens to carry concealed weapons, and nearly that number have laws allowing open carry of guns as well. Many of these states place certain restrictions on both types of carrying, often requiring gun toters to obtain a permit, but the progress toward more firearms freedom is clearly gaining momentum.



The latest move in that direction is to allow the carrying of concealed weapons in establishments that serve alcohol. The *New York Times* [reports](#) that Tennessee has just become the fourth state to enact a law “explicitly allowing loaded guns in bars. Eighteen other states allow weapons in restaurants that serve alcohol.” In addition, “20 other state ... do not address the question, appearing by default to allow those with permits to carry guns into establishments that serve alcohol, according to the Legal Community Against Violence, a nonprofit group that promotes gun control and tracks state gun laws.”

Tennessee’s law prohibits permit-holders from drinking alcohol while carrying their weapons, a provision that is insufficient to satisfy gun-control proponents. As the *Times* points out, “critics of the law say the provision is no guarantee of safety, pointing to a recent shooting in Virginia where a customer who had a permit to carry a concealed weapon shot himself in the leg while drinking beer at a restaurant.” Of course, there are also laws prohibiting drunk driving, but this doesn’t prevent some tipsy folks from getting behind the wheel anyway. For that matter, gun bans are themselves no guarantee of safety: Washington, D.C., with some of the most restrictive gun laws in the country, also maintains one of its highest murder rates. Government — which cannot guarantee 100 percent safety no matter how much public officials and lobbyists may wish it could — certainly should not try to do so at the expense of individual liberty.

The Volunteer State’s act is also a nice nod toward property rights. “The law allows restaurant and bar owners to prohibit people from carrying weapons inside their establishments by posting signs out front,” according to the *Times*. “But many restaurateurs are reluctant to discourage the patronage of gun owners, often saying privately that they do not allow guns but holding off on posting a sign.” Apparently these businessmen fear declining profits more than they fear violence from their gun-toting



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on October 4, 2010

patrons, which suggests that they consider such violence unlikely.

Those opposed to the law offer up the usual tired arguments. Michael Drescher, a spokesman for Tennessee Governor Phil Bredesen (a Democrat who vetoed the bill only to be overridden by the legislature), said simply, “Guns and alcohol don’t mix; that’s the bottom line.” David Randolph Smith, the lawyer for a waiter who is suing to overturn the law on the grounds that it creates an unsafe work environment, told the *Times*, “A loaded concealed weapon in a bar is a recognized hazard. I have a right to go into a restaurant or bar and not have people armed. And of course, the waiter has a right to a safe workplace.” Smith assumes that by prohibiting guns in restaurants and bars there will be no such weapons on the premises. But as Mike Gideon, a patron at Bobby’s Idle Hour in Nashville, told the paper, “The guy that’s going to do the bad thing? He’s not worried about the law at all. The ‘No Guns’ sign just says to him, ‘Hey, buddy, smooth sailing.’”

Gideon “said that having a few [gun] permit holders around made any public space safer,” the *Times* writes. Others in favor of the new law expressed similar sentiments to the newspaper. “If someone’s sticking a gun in my face, I’m not relying on their charity to keep me alive,” said Adam Ringenberg, a patron of Nashville’s Past Perfect bar and a gun carrier. State Representative Curry Todd, a Republican who introduced the bill, explained, “The police aren’t going to be able to protect you. They’re going to be checking out the crime scene after you and your family’s been shot or injured or assaulted or raped.”

Opponents of gun rights surely do not desire people to be victimized; in fact, they think that by banning guns they’re protecting people. The reality, however, is that by denying law-abiding citizens the right to be armed, they are indeed consigning them to potential victim status, as those favoring the Tennessee law quite cogently explained.

Fortunately, gun rights in America continue to expand, and criminals are most assuredly aware of this. The enemies of personal gun ownership are as well: Paul Helmke, president of the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, fretted to the *Times* that the “gun lobby” is “starting to move toward needing no permit at all” to carry a weapon. Let’s hope Helmke’s fear is well founded. A free man should not have to ask the government’s permission to arm himself — a position expressed well by the Second Amendment: “the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.”



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