



Written by [Kelly Holt](#) on January 28, 2011

Will Utah be First to Designate a State Gun?

Utah may be the first state to select a state gun. Lawmakers are considering a bill to designate the Browning M1911 the official sidearm. But, according to *The Star*, Jan. 26, protests have already arisen, making the debate not about honoring Browning, but about gun rights because of recent mass shootings.

Representative Carl Wimmer, sponsor of H.B. 219, said the designation should honor the gun's inventor John Moses Browning (left), a Utah native. Browning invented the firearm (also, left) in 1911, and the semiautomatic has proven to be so durable and reliable that it has been in service with US military, law enforcement and private citizens ever since. *The Star* reported that the bill was approved in committee by a 9-2 vote and "is scheduled to be debated by the full House as early as Wednesday."



The Browning M1911 became an [official Army pistol](#) in 1911. According to the *Christian Science Monitor* (CSM), Jan. 26, the gun "... was first tested in action in Mexico as the US Army chased the Mexican raider Pancho Villa after his attack on Columbus, N.M, in 1916."

But lawmakers in the Beehive State are divided in their opinions about the bill.

House minority leader David Litvak opposes designating a state gun, but gives this warning about the Arizona shooting: "We need to be careful about using that tragedy to push a political position," and suggests honoring Browning for all his inventions, not just the M1911.

And State Representative Jennifer Seelig voted against the measure, saying that although she supports gun rights, she sees this bill as sending a bad message about Utah, because a gun is such a polarizing symbol. "It has a lot of deep-rooted, complex and complicated meanings on a wide spectrum, from defending life to taking it," she explained. Seelig would also like to honor Browning in a different way.

But Wimmer said he'd been planning to introduce the bill for about a year, and the Arizona shooting didn't change his mind. "There is nothing about the actions of a madman to change the fact that firearms have been used throughout our history to defend American values and traditions," he noted.

His view is also supported by Representative Stephen Sandstrom, who thinks the designation of the state gun is appropriate for Browning. He explains,

Instead of the gun being blamed for killing people, it should be credited for saving lives on the battlefield.

Tragic events happen because of bad people in this world. But handguns, and firearms in general, do not kill people. We need to stop demonizing firearms.



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Steve Gunn, board member of the Gun Violence Prevention Center in Utah, denounced the “state gun” idea despite the fact that the perpetrators of recent mass shootings in America used semiautomatic pistols. (The Arizona shooting which resulted in six deaths was carried out with a Glock.) He said, “It’s an embarrassment to the state to have as a symbol that was used only a few weeks ago to kill innocent people.”

The *CSM* also reported that Pennsylvania is in the race for first state to designate a state gun:

A bill in Pennsylvania’s state senate aims to make the mid-18th century Pennsylvania long rifle, a technological milestone in gun innovation for its range and durability, an official symbol.

"It served, truly, to help win the battles that established our independence ... and to open up the frontier as the nation moved west," Army firearms curator Randy Hackenburg, told *Pennlive.com*.

The [New York Times](#) reported on Wednesday that regardless of whether or not Browning’s gun gets a state designation, his birthday is still honored:

On Monday, the Utah State Capitol celebrated Browning Day, honoring John Moses Browning, native son and maker of the nominee for Official State Firearm. There were speeches, a proclamation, a flyover by a National Guard helicopter, and, of course, a rotunda full of guns. "We recognize his efforts to preserve the Constitution," Governor Gary Herbert said.



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