



Californians denied human right to self-defense



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When seconds count, the police are only minutes away. The worst terrorist attack on American soil in recent times unfolded two weeks ago, just down the street from the San Bernardino County Sheriff's headquarters. By all accounts, the Sheriff's Department, San Bernardino police and other law enforcement responded rapidly and performed admirably. But it wasn't enough to prevent the deaths of 14 innocent people and injuries of more.

It's mostly coastal California that lags behind the rest of America in allowing good citizens to discreetly carry self-defense firearms. People in the Inland counties get it. California law gives the power to issue concealed carry licenses to local chief law enforcement officers.

As a result, whether you are allowed your right to self-protection outside your home depends entirely on which county you reside in.

We are fortunate in the Inland Empire to have sheriffs who generally trust the people to exercise this basic right. But if you live in Los Angeles County or the Bay Area, you can forget getting a license - unless you have the right political connections.

We should never again be in doubt about the need to allow good citizens the right to carry. It was brought home to us in terrifying, vivid reality at the Inland Regional Center, perhaps the last place we could have imagined as a target of extremist terrorism. Other mass shootings (Pearl, Mississippi in 1997, to name one) were successfully stopped by legally armed citizens on the scene when the shooting started.

By now we have nearly 30 years of solid experience, starting with Florida, of so-called “shall issue” right to carry laws. In 1987, when Florida enacted its shall issue law, some feared the Sunshine State would become instead the “Gunshine State” as carry permit holders would have shootouts over minor disputes.

What really happened, though, was a lesson that all the other states have learned from. All but California, that is. Concealed carry permit holders turned out to be some of the most law-abiding and cautious Floridians. And the murder rate, according to criminologist John Lott’s book, “More Guns, Less Crime,” dropped off dramatically.

And Florida was just the beginning. Since then, every one of the states that didn’t have right to carry laws enacted them. They learned from experience that the fears of blood running in the streets and shootouts over parking spaces were unfounded. As Washington County Sheriff Jim Frank was quoted in Minnesota Public Radio News in 2004, “People said all sorts of bad things were going to happen, and it doesn’t look like that’s happened.”

Are Californians not “everyday citizens,” the same as Floridians? Are Californians less responsible, more evil or less intelligent?

California should catch up with the rest of America. We should adopt a right to carry law that requires the government to issue a license to every adult Californian who wants one, barring only violent felons and the dangerously mentally ill. And we should do it before the next terrorist attack.

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