



Loosen the rules for carrying guns

12:00 AM PST on Monday, December 12, 2005

By TIMOTHY WHEELER

A debate has begun over which Inland Empire residents should be allowed permits to carry concealed weapons. It's about time we talked about it -- most other states have worked through the debate, leaving California in a minority of states that deny permits to good people.

Thirty-eight states now issue permits to law-abiding citizens to carry personal firearms for self-protection. But California's law leaves permit-granting authority to local chief law enforcement officers, making for a complex patchwork of rules that are often unfairly applied. Some sheriffs grant permits to any good citizens who apply. But in Los Angeles or San Francisco, you can forget it unless you are a celebrity or other well-connected worthy.

No matter where you live in California, you are at some risk of victimization by violent criminals. A single woman stalked by a jealous ex-husband, a doctor driving to an emergency room at night, an office worker leaving work after dark -- all have legitimate needs for self-defense.

We in the Inland Empire can predict from other states' successes how we would fare with a just carry permit law:

No more than 5 percent of Inland Empire residents would even apply for firearm carry permits. Those who do would be among our most conscientiously law-abiding neighbors.

Violent crime would decrease if carry permits were issued to more good citizens. Criminology research over the past two decades has shown consistently that violent crime drops when carry permits are made more available to the good guys (and women). Violent predators prefer unarmed victims.

Carry permit holders would exercise restraint and wisdom. They would use lethal force only when necessary to prevent death or grave bodily harm. By law, they would be trained in the rules authorizing citizen use of lethal force, and many would have additional training.

Are Riverside government officials justified in having carry permits? After the 1998 City Hall shooting, it seems obvious that they are. But what's good for them is good for us all. It's time for California to catch up with the rest of the nation and enact a law that will allow all good citizens to have a firearm carry permit. Self-defense is not a perk for the privileged. It is a natural right of the people.

Timothy Wheeler, MD is director of Doctors for Responsible Gun Ownership, a project of the Claremont Institute (www.claremont.org).

Online at:

http://www.pe.com/localnews/opinion/localviews/stories/PE_OpEd_Opinion_D_op_12_guns_loc.7d848d2.html