

## WEAPONS OF CHOICE

# Allowing guns into bars has 'surprising' result

## State's change to concealed-carry law doesn't have effect many predicted

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When Virginia passed a law allowing concealed carry in bars and alcohol-serving restaurants beginning July 1 of last year, opponents of the change decried the dangers of mixing guns and alcohol, for fear violent crimes would escalate.

But one year later, the Richmond Times-Dispatch did a study to see if the gloomy prognostications came true.

According to state police records, not only did gun violence in bars and restaurants *not* increase under the new law, it *decreased* by 5.2 percent.

In fact, of the 145 reported crimes with guns that occurred in Virginia bars and restaurants in fiscal 2010-11 (compared to 153 incidents in the year before the new law took effect), only two of the aggravated assault cases were related to concealed-carry permit holders. In one incident, the crime took place at a restaurant that didn't serve alcohol – thus unrelated to the new law – and in the other, the weapon was neither discharged nor withdrawn from its holster.

"The numbers basically just confirm what we've said would happen if the General Assembly changed the law," Philip Van Cleave, president of the pro-gun Virginia Citizens Defense League, told the Times-Dispatch. "Keep in mind what the other side was saying – that this was going to be a blood bath, that restaurants will be dangerous and people will stop going. But there was nothing to base the fear-mongering on."

State Sen. A. Donald McEachin, D-Henrico, remains opposed to the law, arguing one year's statistics don't prove anything.

"Most folks obey the law, and that's a good thing," said McEachin. "But I don't think it takes a rocket scientist to figure out that just like drinking and driving doesn't mix, guns and drinking don't mix."

But the Cato Institute's David Rittgers told the Times-Dispatch that years of data from the *other* 42 states that allow concealed carry in bars demonstrate loosening gun laws like Virginia has done not only fails to generate violence, it often decreases it.

"The worst that you can say about these laws is that they are statistically value neutral" in terms of impacting the crime rate, Rittgers said.

Rittgers added that other states with concealed-carry restrictions in alcohol-serving establishments have – like Virginia – relaxed those over time "because of the lack of violent incidents that might be connected with persons carrying concealed [weapons] with a permit."

### **When guns *were* tied to crime**

Further analysis of police data reveals the details of those few crimes in Virginia last year that were related to concealed-carry permit holders and alcohol-serving establishments:

In one incident, the Times-Dispatch reports, a drunken customer at a deli in York County allegedly sexually harassed a female waitress and, at one point, placed his hand over his legally concealed gun so the waitress could see its outline. After he left the deli, police charged him with driving under the influence, brandishing a firearm and carrying a concealed weapon while drinking, still a crime in Virginia despite the new law.

In another incident, a concealed-permit holder at a Lynchburg restaurant reached into his pocket to pay for his beer tab and accidentally discharged the gun there, shooting himself in the thigh. He was convicted, the paper reports, of recklessly handling a firearm and lost his concealed-carry permit for a year. His gun was confiscated.

Tom Lisk, a lobbyist who represents the Virginia Hospitality and Travel Association and who opposes Virginia's lifting of the restriction on firearms in bars, told the Times-Dispatch that while the new law has not led to "random bloodshed in restaurants," he believes his concerns have been validated by the "few incidences of permit holders using bad judgment – drinking and then, in unfortunate circumstances ... shooting themselves or accosting a waitress."

"I promise you that the waitress that had the gun brandished at her by someone who was drunk and sexually aggressive – to her that was a serious offense," McEachin added. "And when someone gives themselves a self-inflicted wound, that just underscores the

fact that guns and drinking don't mix. I don't know if there's anything disproven by those numbers."

But Van Cleave believes he and other supporters of the law deserve an apology – especially those who "screamed the end of the world was coming with this."

"At some point," Van Cleave told the Times-Dispatch, "it would be nice to have some of them admit that they were wrong, that they didn't see any of the horrible things that they thought were going to happen."