

Gunning for a New Law

**By Reg P. Wydeven
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One of the most entertaining movies of all time is 'Desperado,' the 1996 post-western film starring Antonio Banderas. Banderas portrays El Mariachi, a modern-day gunslinger bent on getting revenge against the man who killed his girl and shot his hand.

Even though the flick featured Banderas, Cheech Marin, Quinton Terrantino and Selma Hayek, it had an extremely small budget. Apparently, a huge portion of that budget was spent on firearm blanks. The film's director, Robert Rodriguez, is a fan of the movie 'The Wild Bunch,' which allegedly had more bullets fired than in the actual Mexican Civil War. The movie was clearly an inspiration for Rodriguez, as he apparently tried to break that record in one scene.

In the scene, El Mariachi enters a cantina carrying his guitar case, which secretly holds a small arsenal of handguns, shotguns, grenades and ammo. He begins shooting up the bar, killing dozens of bad guys by shooting them behind his back, between his legs and any several other creative ways. The scene is ranked in the Top 10 gunfights of all time on several websites.

Many residents of Tennessee are hoping a proposed new law doesn't turn their state into the Wild West.

Last week, Tennessee's House of Representatives approved a measure to allow state residents having handgun carrying permits to bring their weapons into any establishment that serves alcohol.

The bill, which was sponsored by Republican Rep. Curry Todd of Collierville, a retired police officer, passed by a 66-23 vote. The bill is a less restrictive version of an earlier measure that would impose an 11 p.m. to 5 a.m. curfew for carrying handguns where alcohol is served and to keep a total ban on establishments that enforce age-restricted entry.

In March, Todd strongly opposed efforts to remove the curfew from the bill and he informed reporters that he wouldn't vote for a bill without the time limits in it. Supporters of the curfew claim they wanted handgun carry rights to extend to family restaurants that also happen to serve alcohol. The 11 p.m. curfew was intended to distinguish those restaurants from bars, since Tennessee law doesn't make an official distinction between the two.

Obviously, Tennessee restaurant and police chiefs associations are opposed to allowing guns in bars, as alcohol and guns aren't always a good combination. Since it was passed by the House, the bill is now before the Senate, which approved a similar measure on a 26-7 vote in April. If the Senate approves the bill, it would then go before Governor Phil Bredesen to either be signed into law or vetoed. So far, the Democratic governor has not indicated what his decision will be.

If Bredesen signs the bill, it would go into effect on June 1. If so, it would not impact Tennessee's existing law that bans the consumption of alcohol while carrying a handgun. In addition, restaurant owners are free to ban weapons from being carried in their establishments.

If the law does pass, it will certainly give a whole new meaning to the phrase, "going to the bar for a couple of shots."