

Starbucks Asks US Customers to Leave Guns at Home

Coffee chain Starbucks Corp has asked U.S. customers to leave their guns at home after being dragged into an increasingly fractious debate over U.S. gun rights in the wake of multiple mass shootings.

While many U.S. restaurant chains and retailers do not allow firearms on their properties, Starbucks' policy had been to default to local gun laws, including "open carry" regulations in many U.S. states that allow people to bring guns into stores.

In August, this led gun-rights advocates to hold a national "Starbucks Appreciation Day" to thank the firm for its stance, pulling the company deeper into the fierce political fight.

Locations for Starbucks Appreciation Day events included Newtown, Conn., where 20 children and six adults were shot dead in an elementary school in December. Starbucks closed that shop before the event was scheduled to begin.

Chief Executive Howard Schultz said in an open letter to customers late Tuesday that Starbucks Appreciation Day events "disingenuously portray Starbucks as a champion of 'open carry.' To be clear: we do not want these events in our stores."

The letter will appear in major U.S. newspapers on Thursday, including the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal* and the *Washington Post*.

The coffee chain did not, however, issue an outright ban on guns in its nearly 7,000 company-owned cafes, saying this would potentially require staff to confront armed customers.

The Seattle-based company hoped to give “responsible gun owners a chance to respect its request,” Schultz said.

The National Rifle Association, a powerful pro-gun lobbying group, did not have an immediate comment on the Starbucks letter and made no mention of it on its Twitter or Facebook pages.

But one gun rights advocate said he would stop getting coffee at Starbucks.

“It’s their choice and we support their right as a private business to make that choice. Gun owners will choose on their own if they want to patronize them or not,” said Rob Harris, media director for Michigan Open Carry, a group that took part in Starbucks Appreciation Day events this summer.

A gun control advocacy group formed days after Newtown, killings, “Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America,” predicted other large companies would follow Starbucks’ lead.

“This policy change represents a sea change in American culture, which is finally shifting away from allowing guns in public places,” Shannon Watts, the group’s founder, said in a statement.

The Starbucks CEO told Reuters the policy change was not the result of the Newtown Starbucks Appreciation Day event, which prompted the Newtown Action Alliance to call on the company to ban guns at all of its U.S. stores. Nor was it in response to the mass shooting this week at the Washington Navy Yard.

“We’ve seen the ‘open carry’ debate become increasingly uncivil and, in some cases, even threatening,” Schultz wrote, noting that “some anti-gun activists have also played a role in ratcheting up the rhetoric and friction,” at times soliciting and confronting employees and patrons.

“We found ourselves in a position where advocates on both

sides of the issue were using Starbucks as a staging ground for their own political position,” said Schultz, who in the past has willingly waded into the public debate over the U.S. national debt and gay marriage.

Schultz said more people had been bringing guns into Starbucks shops over the last six months, prompting confusion and dismay among some customers and employees.

“I’m not worried we’re going to lose customers over this,” he told Reuters. “I feel like I’ve made the best decision in the interest of our company.”

Starbucks’ request does not apply to authorized law enforcement personnel.

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