GunsCritical Newsletter

November 2026 · Issue 1

Deer season, a big Supreme Court case in December, and the Winchester 1873

by Joe Miller · gunscritical.com · for members

1. From Joe

Welcome to the first Guns Critical newsletter. Every month I'll bring you what changed in gun law, one gun worth knowing, one drill, one safety habit, and what to do with your guns this season, all in plain English. November is deer season across most of the country and the start of the holidays, so this issue is about getting your rifle ready, keeping guns secure when the house fills up with company, and a big case coming to the Supreme Court in December.

2. Law and courts roundup

As of November 11, 2026. Laws change often; check your state before you buy, carry or travel.

- **Supreme Court will hear the AR-15 case on December 2.** *Viramontes v. Cook County* (a ban on AR-15s and other semi-automatic rifles in Cook County, Illinois) and *Grant v. Higgins* (Connecticut's similar ban) were combined. Lower courts upheld both bans. A decision is expected by summer 2027 and could affect the roughly dozen states with similar laws.
- **Massachusetts voters kept the 2024 gun law.** Question 9 on the November 3 ballot would have repealed it; voters said no. The law, which covers registration, a broader "assault-style firearm" definition, ghost-gun serial numbers and live-fire training for permits, stays in force. Court challenges continue.
- **New Jersey's rifle and magazine ban is on hold in court, but still enforced.** The full Third Circuit voted 10 to 5 that the state's rifle ban and 10-round magazine limit are unconstitutional, but the ruling is paused while New Jersey asks the Supreme Court to step in.
- **Virginia's new assault-weapon and magazine ban stays blocked.** On November 2 a state judge widened the order blocking SB 749; it runs through December 31, 2026, or until a final ruling.
- **Colorado's permit-to-purchase law stands for now.** On November 4 a federal judge refused to block it while the lawsuit goes on.
- **Federal machine-gun ban stays.** On November 4 the Fifth Circuit declined, 9 to 8, to rehear a challenge as a full court; the case goes back to a three-judge panel.
- **Handguns for 18- to 20-year-olds:** in September the Justice Department said it considers the federal ban on dealers selling handguns to adults under 21 unconstitutional, and a Fifth Circuit case continues. Until the rule formally changes, expect dealers to keep following it.

- **Reminder from June:** in *Wolford v. Lopez* the Supreme Court struck down Hawaii's rule that banned carrying on private property open to the public (stores, gas stations) unless the owner gave permission. Posted "no guns" signs still count, so read the door.
- **Just for fun:** Idaho voters picked an official state gun in an advisory vote: the **Winchester Model 1873**, "the gun that won the West," with about 31% of the vote. That makes it our gun of the month.

3. Safety tip

Holiday guests mean more hands and curious kids. Before company arrives:

- Lock every gun in a safe or with a cable lock, including the nightstand gun. Carry it on your body or lock it up; never leave it in a drawer or purse.
- Ask relatives who are coming to stay whether they are bringing a gun, and give them a place to lock it.
- Teach visiting children the rule: **stop, don't touch, run away, tell a grown-up**. See kids and gun safety.
- Alcohol and guns never mix, including at the deer camp after the hunt.

4. Gun of the month

Winchester Model 1873

The lever-action rifle that settled the West, and Idaho's new state gun. Introduced in 1873 for the .44-40 cartridge, it let a cowboy carry one caliber for his rifle and his revolver. Today's Winchester-branded rifles are made by Miroku in Japan to the original design, and Uberti and Cimarron make Italian replicas.

	Winchester Model 1873 Short Rifle
Action	Lever action, toggle-link
Calibers	.357 Magnum (fires .38 Special too), .45 Colt, .44-40 Winchester
Barrel	20 inches (other versions 24 to 25 inches)
Magazine	10 rounds in the short rifle; up to 13 to 14 in longer models
Price	About $1,300 to $1,600 list; seen from about $1,150 to $1,850
Alternatives	Uberti 1873 and Cimarron 1873 replicas; for a lower-cost lever gun, the Henry Big Boy or Marlin 1894

Good for: cowboy action shooting, plinking with cheap .38 Special, short-range deer and hogs with .357 Magnum or .45 Colt, and just the history. **Not ideal for:** long-range shots or mounting a scope. It's a smooth, heavy rifle that is a joy to shoot.

Buy: Winchester · GunBroker listings · Uberti 1873

5. Season

Deer season checklist

1. **Confirm your zero** at 100 yards with the exact ammo you will hunt with. See zeroing a scope.
2. **Check scope rings and base screws** for tightness; a loose scope is the most common reason for a miss.
3. **Know your state's rules:** blaze orange, legal hours, tags, and whether your caliber is legal. Members: hunting by game.
4. **Practice from field positions**: sitting, kneeling and off shooting sticks, not just the bench.
5. **Know where to aim:** just behind the front leg, a third of the way up. See the deer vitals picture in hunting.

Cold-weather gun care

- Bringing a cold gun into a warm house makes condensation inside. Leave it in its case for a few hours to warm up slowly, then wipe it down and oil lightly.
- Use a thin lubricant in freezing weather; heavy grease can thicken and slow the action.
- Keep snow out of the barrel; a bit of tape over the muzzle works, and you can shoot right through it.

6. Ammo price check

Typical per-round prices this fall (approximate; they change with demand). See buying ammo smart.

Caliber	Practice	Hunting or defense
.22 LR	6 to 12 cents	10 to 20 cents
9mm	25 to 40 cents	75 cents to $1.25
.223 / 5.56	40 to 70 cents	$1 to $1.75
.308 Win	90 cents to $1.50	$1.75 to $3
.30-06	$1 to $1.60	$1.75 to $3
12 gauge	35 to 60 cents	90 cents to $2 (buck or slug)

Tip: hunting ammo sells out right before opening day. Buy two boxes of your load early: one to confirm zero, one to hunt.

7. Drill of the month

The cold-bore shot

Your first shot on a deer comes from a cold, clean barrel, and it can land a little differently than the rest of a group. Each time you go to the range this month, make your **first** shot of the day count: one careful shot at 100 yards from a field position, before any warm-up. Mark it and date it. After three or four trips you'll know exactly where your first shot goes.

Print the sight-in grid target (PDF).

8. Maintenance checklist

- After every wet or snowy hunt: dry the gun, wipe it inside and out, and oil lightly.
- Pull the bolt and check for rust and debris.
- Check sling swivels and studs; a sling failure drops a rifle.
- Replace batteries in red dots, lights and rangefinders before the season.
- Check your safe's dehumidifier or desiccant and recharge it.
- See cleaning a rifle step by step.

9. Myth vs. fact

Myth: "You can buy a gun as a gift for anyone."

Fact: A real gift is legal when you buy it with your own money for someone who can legally own it. But buying a gun for someone who asked you to buy it for them, because they can't or don't want to pass the check, is a **straw purchase**, a federal felony. If the person lives in another state, the gun has to be shipped to a dealer in their state for the transfer. A gift card from a gun shop avoids all of it.

10. Three-question quiz

1. What date does the Supreme Court hear the AR-15 case?
2. When you bring a cold gun into a warm house, what should you do?
3. What three calibers does the modern Winchester Model 1873 come in?

11. Coming next month

December: a gun-owner's gift guide for every budget, a year-end roundup of the biggest gun-law changes of 2026, what happened at the Supreme Court argument, the gun of the month, and a winter dry-fire routine you can do at home.

Quiz answers

1. December 2, 2026 (Viramontes v. Cook County and Grant v. Higgins).

2. Leave it in its case for a few hours to warm up, then wipe it down and oil it lightly.
3. .357 Magnum (also fires .38 Special), .45 Colt and .44-40 Winchester.

Education, not legal advice. Laws vary by state and change often. Check your state's laws, or ask a local gun shop or attorney.

Sources

Checked November 11, 2026.

- SCOTUSblog: December arguments, Viramontes and Grant
- WBUR: Massachusetts Question 9 results
- The Gun Mag: Grassroots Judicial Report, November 11, 2026
- Faegre Drinker: Supreme Court decides Wolford v. Lopez
- 2026 Idaho Official State Gun Question
- Winchester: Model 1873 Short Rifle
- Gun Made: Model 1873 Short Rifle prices
- ATF: Straw purchases (Don't Lie for the Other Guy)