



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on September 21, 2009

## Yoga Ban Brings Guns to Town Common

When the Raymond, New Hampshire, selectmen refused permission to a local resident to hold a yoga class on the town green in honor of the United Nations International Day of Peace, they may not have anticipated the decision would draw gun-toting libertarians and others to the site to show support for First and Second Amendment rights.



Molly Schlangen, the yoga instructor who had planned to hold a complimentary class on the green on Sunday, held it instead at her studio in the neighboring town of Epping. But two other gatherings were held on the town common that day. At noon about 20 members of the Free State Project, a movement to draw people to New Hampshire to work for smaller government and greater protections of individual liberty, showed up to demonstrate their support for freedom of speech and the right to peacefully assemble, as well as the Second Amendment right to bear arms. Several of them were wearing guns, in accordance with the state's "open carry" law.

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Later in the afternoon, between 30 and 40 local residents showed up, including Selectman Cheryl Killam, who had voted to grant the request for the yoga class. "If we had approved it, there wouldn't be this much focus on it," Killam told the *Concord Monitor*. "It would not have drawn this publicity."

But the board voted 3-2 on September 14th to deny the request, which they said had not been made in time to be placed on the agenda. But Selectman Jack Barnes, who is also a state senator, later admitted he had a "knee jerk reaction" when he heard the planned yoga class was to call attention to a day of "peace."

"What kind of a crowd is this going to gather?" he asked at the selectmen's meeting. "This is a peace group, we are at war and I wonder if this is going to bring crowds on both sides of the issue and whether we're going to need police down there." Barnes, a 78-year-old Korean War veteran, said his father was a World War I veteran and one of his nephews was killed in Vietnam. He referred to instances in New Hampshire and around the country in recent years when anti-war protestors demonstrated at the funerals of soldiers in the Iraq and Afghan wars, something he said involved "hot button issues."

But there were no incidents when the two groups gathered peacefully on the green Sunday. The "Free



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Staters" protested with signs and song, while a Raymond woman hung a string of Tibetan prayer flags at the common. A local folksinger performed a satirical song about how the National Guard might have to be called out to protect the town from the "yoga for peace people."

All of the fuss may have been due to a misunderstanding at the selectmen's meeting, as the board received the request just before the meeting. Town Manager Chris Rose later said permission of is not necessary for people to gather own the common, though town officials do like to be notified of group activities in advance to ensure that the space is accessible to everyone. A yoga class was held on the green for last year's Day of Peace with about 20 people in attendance, according to one of the participants.

Schlangen, who came to the common after holding the class at her studio on Sunday, said the controversy and attendant publicity may have been a good thing. "The greatest outcome is now people know there is an International Day of Peace," she said. For the Free Staters, the issue was not international peace or the United Nations, but the right of Americans to exercise their constitutional liberties.

"My thing is the Second Amendment rights protect the First Amendment rights," Free State Project member Jay Dobie of Dunbarton told the *Monitor*. Dobie wore a sidearm and carried a sign with a message about the rights free speech and peaceful assembly. "One thing we're very good about is exercising our rights," he said.

*Photo: AP Images*



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