



# TO THE BAG

## THE REIGN OF REIN

To the *Bag*:

Thank you for highlighting the “free reign” mistake in your collection of law-journal usage gaffes. (Bryan A. Garner, *The 15 Biggest Usage Gaffes in 2017 Law Journals*, 21 *Green Bag* 2d 93, 94 (2018).) A search on the Westlaw News database finds over 7,000 occurrences of those words (admittedly, catching a few non-errors – one article discusses Queen Elizabeth’s “largely scandal-free reign” before the 1990s). The mistake appears not only in small newspapers such as the *Sentinel* (Carlisle, PA) and the *Times-Georgian* (Carrollton, GA), but also in our papers of record, including the *New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *Guardian* (UK).

It may be that we are in the midst of a transition from “free rein” to “free reign.” Few any longer remember the origins of the phrase “free rein,” meaning to hold the reins loosely while riding (thus giving the horse freedom of movement). And “free reign” makes some sense – a sovereign may have extensive latitude in exercising its power.

Nevertheless, “free reign” sets my teeth on edge, and I appreciate your vote for “free rein.”

Yours,

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