

New bill proposes no guns in school

People with concealed-weapons permits couldn't carry on campus

BY JULIA SILVERMAN
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PORTLAND -- Several years ago, a North Clackamas school district custodian who had a concealed-weapons permit left his gun in a backpack overnight at an elementary school.

Even now, Superintendent Ron Naso shudders to think what could have happened if a child had found that backpack the next day, instead of a teacher.

Naso came to a hearing Friday in support of Senate Bill 335, which would let school boards choose whether to prohibit concealed weapons permit holders from bringing guns to school.

"The school is not a place for firearms, legal or otherwise," Naso said at a hearing in Portland, one of the first hearings on any bill this year to be held outside of the Capitol. "Guns don't belong on school property unless they are in the possession of trained police officers."

▼ ADVERTISEMENT ▼ Michael Pliska is a Portland-area resident who has a concealed-weapons permit and opposes SB335.

"It is not our guns you need to worry about," Pliska told members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, chaired by Sen. Ginny Burdick, D-Portland. "It is our votes, and our grass-roots activism in the next election if you do support this bill."

No decisions were made at Friday's hearing. It was a chance for Burdick and the six other committee members to hear public testimony on the proposal. But emotions still ran high.

The proposal is controversial among members of the Oregon School Boards Association, which brought the legislation to the Judiciary Committee.

"The school board in John Day will likely not adopt this policy," said Jim Green, a lobbyist for OSBA. "In Eugene, they will debate and discuss it. Some places, it may never show up on the radar. This bill is about local control, and we believe the debate about controls on school buildings lies with locally elected school boards."

Rod Harder, a consultant to the National Rifle Association, said letting some school boards adopt the policy while others do not would result in a "hodgepodge, with local gun owners not knowing when they are legal, and when they are not."

Gun advocates called the bill "a solution for a problem that does not exist," saying that instances of a licensed handgun holder causing security problems at school were few and far between.

"I could no longer attend the football or soccer practice of one of my grandsons, because I would not be able to invoke my certified right to protect myself," gun owner Bob Karl said.

Mark Chism, a Tigard-Tualatin School Board member, called himself "an experienced marksman and well-trained gun owner." Still, he said

training given to holders of concealed-weapons permits isn't enough to guarantee that they can be trusted to handle a weapon around schoolchildren.

Also at the hearing, Ben Rawlins, general counsel to the Oregon University System, asked legislators to consider expanding the bill to include college campuses.

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