

Published: 03.02.2005

## Bill would allow guns in schools, anywhere

### Concealed-weapons measure gets preliminary House OK

By Howard Fischer

CAPITOL MEDIA SERVICES

PHOENIX - The House of Representatives voted Tuesday to let people carry weapons - including guns, grenades, rockets, mines and sawed-off shotguns - into schools, polling places and nuclear plants if they claim they're only trying to protect themselves.

The vote on the legislation came after Rep. Ben Miranda, D-Phoenix, pointed out it would bar prosecution of those who want to bring a weapon into the House or Senate. Despite that, lawmakers gave it preliminary approval on a 30-16 margin.

But what's in House Bill 2666 surprised even Rep. Doug Quelland, R-Phoenix, who introduced the legislation and shepherded it through the House. He said he had no idea the legislation, crafted by constituents he wouldn't identify, was so broad that it would provide a catchall exemption in the state's weapons laws.

Quelland said he wants to ensure that those who carry a concealed weapon without getting the required state permit do not wind up being charged with a crime.

He said that, if it were up to him, anyone would be able to carry a weapon in a pocket or purse or in a holster beneath a jacket without getting state permission. Quelland said only people who prey on others should be prosecuted under gun laws.

But he conceded that's not what his bill does.

Current statutes list a series of acts that are a crime. These range from carrying a concealed weapon without a permit and having a deadly weapon on school grounds, to possessing certain "prohibited weapons," which includes bombs, grenades and automatic rifles.

The restrictions do not apply to peace officers, members of the military, correctional officers and anyone specifically authorized under state and federal law to have these weapons.

HB 2666 would add a new exemption: any U.S. citizen "who carries a deadly weapon for personal protection or the protection of others." The exception also extends to those who are protecting "the state" as well as any home - whether or not the person lives there.

Some of the weapons that would be allowed under this legislation might still be banned under federal law. But Miranda warned his colleagues to consider what they are proposing.

"Even if the speaker (of the House) sent me a letter saying that I was not to carry a weapon into this House, I could do so," he said. Miranda said he could not be prosecuted "so long as I said I was there to protect myself from anyone."

#### Who to call

- To tell lawmakers your opinion:
- Legislative switchboard in Phoenix: **1-800-352-8404**.
- Tucson satellite office: **398-6000**.
- Internet: **www.azleg.state.az.us**

#### NewsTalk

- *What is your opinion of this legislation?*
- *In what situations, if at all, should concealed weapons be allowed to be carried?*

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He said it is a loophole waiting to be exploited by anyone caught with a gun - or other weapon - where he or she was not supposed to have one.

But Quelland, on the House floor, defended his measure.

Two parents in Tucson said they were opposed to the bill, especially if it allowed people to carry concealed weapons onto school campuses.

"I don't see any benefits to allowing anyone to carry a concealed weapon," said Kendal Morgan, whose son attends University High School.

"You have a lot of characters running around out there that shouldn't be carrying weapons," he said.

Carol Mack, whose daughter attends Cienega High School, said that while she is an advocate for gun ownership, she doesn't think concealed weapons belong on high school or university campuses. "If you're afraid to go to a college campus without a weapon, I think we need more security," she said.

Todd Rathner, a member of the NRA's national board of directors, said that while the NRA had not focused on the bill, he agreed with it in spirit.

The bill would not increase public danger, and would allow law-abiding citizens to carry a concealed weapon for the purposes of protection.

"Carrying a concealed weapon should not be a crime," said Rathner, a Tucson resident.

Legislation against guns should focus on people who commit crimes, he said.

It was only later, when asked about the bill by Capitol Media Services, that Quelland admitted he had no idea the "defense" exemption in his legislation was so broad.

What happens now, he said, is he will ask the House to give the measure final approval, as it is too late to amend it. But Quelland promised to scale the measure back when it is debated in the Senate.

There was no recorded vote Tuesday nor any way of getting a full list of who supported the legislation. That will not occur until a final required roll call that has not yet been scheduled.

No Southern Arizona lawmakers signed on as sponsors of the measure.

This bill was one of two gun-related measures that gained House support on Tuesday.

A second allows anyone who gets a permit to carry a concealed weapon to keep that permission for life. Gone would be the requirement to renew the license every four years, undergo a new background check and attend a firearms refresher course.

HB 2325 also would cut the required hours of initial training to get a permit in half, to eight hours.

The votes come as another measure making its way through the legislative process would repeal laws that preclude someone from having a firearm where alcohol is served. SB 1363, awaiting Senate debate, would permit guns if the bar or restaurant owner does not post a written notice, and if the patron promises not to imbibe.

• *Star reporter Aaron Mackey contributed to this story.*

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