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Burdick's bill lets schools bar legal concealed weapons

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JEFF MAPES

SALEM -- Sen. Ginny Burdick, the Legislature's staunchest backer of gun control, on Wednesday kicked off this session's war over guns by introducing a bill putting new restrictions on holders of concealed handgun licenses.

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The measure, Senate Bill 335, would allow school districts to prohibit concealed handgun licenses from carrying their guns on school grounds.

Burdick, D-Portland, has introduced the measure before without success. But, thanks to the new Democratic majority in the Senate, she now chairs the Senate Judiciary Committee and has a better chance of getting the measure enacted.

"At a minimum, we need to make sure that school districts have the ability to make the schools truly gun-free," said Burdick, who sponsored the 2000 ballot measure that required background checks on purchasers at gun shows.

The measure has been opposed by gun advocates who say it infringes on the rights of gun permit holders.

Kevin Starrett of the Oregon Firearms Federation said it didn't make any sense to carve out particular locations where holders of concealed handgun licenses aren't allowed to defend themselves.

"If I can't be trusted (with a gun) on school property, why am I trusted on a playground?" he asked. "Why am I trusted in my house? Why am I trusted in a bank?"

Burdick acknowledged there have not been any incidents of violence involving concealed handgun owners on school grounds. But she said school districts should be able to make the choice to keep all guns away.

Starrett argued that permit holders can have a legitimate reason to want to carry their guns onto school property. For example, he said a woman facing threats from an ex-spouse may be particularly vulnerable to attack when she is picking a child up at school because it is a time and place known to the person threatening her.

Starrett conceded that Burdick could probably round up the votes to pass the bill in the Senate. But he said he hoped the bill could be blocked in the Republican-led House.

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