

Legislation filed for colleges to allow concealed handguns

Written by Administrator
Thursday, 24 January 2013 14:29

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — This week's gunfire at a Houston-area college prompted new calls Wednesday for allowing concealed handgun license holders to carry their weapons into Texas college buildings and classrooms as a measure of self-defense.

Texas lawmakers already are considering a bill that allows concealed handguns in college classrooms. A similar measure failed in 2011, but last month's shooting at an elementary school in Newtown, Conn., had already helped renew the debate over safety in schools, and Tuesday's gunfire at Lone Star College had supporters looking to rally more support.

Sen. Brian Birdwell, R-Granbury, who filed the Campus Personal Protection Act last week, called the Lone Star College shooting a prime example for the need for his bill.

"It affirms what we know is true: When you disarm law-abiding citizens that we ought to trust, we make them defenseless," Birdwell said.

The prospects for the bill's passage are uncertain in a session that began Jan. 8 and runs until Memorial Day. So far, 14 senators, all Republicans, in the 31-member Senate have signed on in support of Birdwell's bill. But in 2011, the measure was backed by a large majority in the House and Senate and Gov. Rick Perry, a concealed handgun license holder, before dying without a final vote at the end of the session.

College administrators have generally not supported the bill in the past, saying they worry more guns will spark more campus violence and suicide. Supporters call it a critical self-defense measure and guns rights issue.

"It levels the playing field," in terms of safety, said Sen. Donna Campbell, R-New Braunfels. "We have to allow people the option for self-protection."

And if the shooter at Lone Star College had turned the gun on others "and blasted folks ... I would have been thankful if somebody with a concealed handgun would have shot the people killing innocent folks," Campbell said.

Texas passed its concealed handgun license law in 1995. License holders must be at least 21 and pass a training course.

Sen. Rodney Ellis, D-Houston, said supporters should "be careful about using an incident like that for political gain," Ellis said.

Ellis, who opposes the bill, said professors may be intimidated by students if they are worried about who may be armed.

"It's a tense atmosphere," Ellis said.

EDUCATION CHIEF: COURT PUTS FUNDING TALKS ON HOLD

Texas Education Commissioner Michael Williams on Wednesday sidestepped the debate over \$5.4 billion slashed from public schools two years ago during his first appearance before state budget-writers, who have kept those classroom cuts in place despite more money on the table this time around.

Those cuts triggered a series of lawsuits pitting hundreds of Texas school districts against the state over funding. A judge in Austin plans to rule next month, but his decision will almost certainly be appealed to the state Supreme Court.

Williams, who was appointed by Gov. Rick Perry as the state's new education chief in October, said after testifying to the powerful Senate Finance Committee that it was premature to discuss public school funding until the court case is settled.

"It's more prudent now to wait until we hear what the court tells us," Williams said. "The court is going to make a determination about whether we have adequate dollars or equitable funding. I think it is more prudent for the Legislature not to put loaded sums of money in one area and have the court make a determination that we got to reverse and go back in another direction."

Both the House and Senate introduced budget drafts for 2014-15 last week. Neither restored the public education cuts that the Republican-controlled Legislature made in 2011 while faced with a \$27 billion shortfall. State budget officials testified Wednesday that bills do fund a projected enrollment growth of about 170,000 new students over the next two years, though at the same reduced per-student spending rate installed two years ago.

Asked about the impact those cuts have had in Texas classrooms, Williams spoke optimistically.

Legislation filed for colleges to allow concealed handguns

Written by Administrator

Thursday, 24 January 2013 14:29

"We're not seeing dramatic numbers of schools becoming academically unacceptable or losing accreditation," Williams said. "So I think school districts are doing their part with the dollars they have."

More than 600 school districts across Texas have sued the state, claiming that \$5.4 billion in cuts to public education and grant programs imposed by the Legislature in 2011 have made funding for schools so inadequate and inequitable that it violates the Texas Constitution.

DA: TEXAS CANCER AGENCY PROBES STILL 'AGGRESSIVE'

Prosecutors say their investigation into the state's troubled \$3 billion cancer-fighting effort "is ongoing and aggressive." But they also confirm that current state officials and board members have been cleared.

Travis County District Attorney Rosemary Lehmborg said Wednesday that Chairman Jimmy Mansour and other board members of the Cancer Prevention and Research Institute of Texas "are not under suspicion in the investigation."

Her statement comes a day after Mansour spokesman Bill Miller said the chairman and the rest of the board were cleared but were still working with investigators.

But Miller did not mention past board members or other officials. Lehmborg didn't say who was the specific target of the continuing investigation but said it "is very serious and we are far from finished in our efforts."

SEVEN STATE PARKS MAY CLOSE IF LEGISLATURE DOES NOT SUPPLY MORE FUNDING

The Texas Senate drew lots to see which senators' terms will expire in two years or four years.

It's a once-a-decade exercise that happens after redistricting forces all 31 senators to stand for election in the same year. Drawing lots allows the senators to have staggered terms for the next 10 years.

The senators drew envelopes with pieces of paper numbered one to 31 from a large glass bowl at the front of the chamber. Odd numbers meant four-year terms, even numbers meant two-year terms.

In 2014, 10 Republicans and 5 Democrats will be up for re-election, and 8 Republicans 8 Democrats will face re-election in 2016. The currently empty District 6 seat will be up for re-election in 2016. Republicans hold a 19-12 majority in the Senate.

QUOTE OF THE DAY:

"I would have been thankful if somebody with a concealed handgun would have shot the people killing innocent folks." — Sen. Donna Campbell, R-New Braunfels, on what might have happened if Tuesday's shooting at Houston's Lone Star College had escalated. The shooting left three people wounded.