

LEAVITT, STEPHENS HAVE REACHED GUN-CONTROL COMPROMISE

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Gov. Mike Leavitt and Utah House Speaker Marty Stephens continue publicly to draw lines in the sand on gun control. But behind the scenes, the two Republican leaders have worked out a compromise that Stephens must now try to sell to his mostly hard-line gun-rights GOP House caucus.

Leavitt and Stephens met at the State Capitol recently and tentatively agreed to this Stephens-crafted compromise: The Legislature will pass a bill banning guns from schools and churches, including guns belonging to lawful concealed-weapon permit holders.

The bill, however, will authorize a two-tiered permit system that would recognize those who could prove a potential immediate need to defend themselves, such as having their lives threatened. That exclusive group would be allowed to carry weapons in schools. Law enforcement also would be authorized to carry weapons in those forbidden places.

Stephens, in recent days, has floated the idea among groups most active in the guns-out-of-school movement. It remains to be hammered out whether special permit holders who would have the right to carry at schools also would have the right to carry in state offices, which currently are off-limits, besides law enforcement officers, due to an executive order by Leavitt.

The Leavitt-Stephens compromise has come in the midst of antagonistic rhetoric on both sides. Leavitt, who committed himself to the concept of banning guns in schools and churches earlier this spring in a speech at the Republican State Convention, continues an unwavering position that no guns should be allowed in schools, with no exceptions save for law enforcement officers. Leavitt's jaw-clenched repetitions of that uncompromising statement is about as firm as he has been on an issue during his six-year stint as governor.

Stephens, for his part, has tweaked the governor, his long-time Republican ally, for taking such a strong stand on a gun issue that in recent history has been a poison brew in the legislative body Stephens now runs. The speaker says Leavitt took the position after viewing a poll showing 80 percent of the Utah public wants guns banned from schools and churches. He also argues that concealed-weapon permit holders never have been the problem, and guns already are banned at schools for anyone, besides law enforcement, who does not have a permit.

Stephens has a bigger political problem if the Legislature convenes a special session this fall and passes gun-control measures. His Republican House members who vote for any type of control can expect an impassioned gun-rights movement at the neighborhood caucuses next spring, in which delegates to the GOP convention are elected.

Utah has a history of impassioned groups stacking mass meetings and ousting incumbent legislators who don't tow their line. A recent example is highly respected conservative Republican Rep. Nancy Lyon of Davis County, whose vote on one abortion-related bill angered

the Eagle Forum. That group stacked the mass meetings in her district and ousted her in favor of its hand-picked candidate, who ended up being a one-termer.

But Stephens has yet another problem racing toward him from the other side of the issue. The Utah PTA, the Utah Education Association and the Catholic and Episcopal dioceses are in the process of drafting a gun-control initiative they plan to launch in a petition drive by the end of the summer.

They need the signatures of about 75,000 registered voters -- equal to 10 percent of the number of voters in the last gubernatorial election -- to get the initiative on the 2000 ballot. If approved by the voters, the initiative, which proposes to ban all guns from schools and churches, would become the law, bypassing the legislative process.

The effort has a decent chance of succeeding, given that the LDS Church hierarchy has publicly signaled it is in philosophical sync with the initiative's goal. The initiative movement keeps gaining momentum and may soon include the Utah Hospital Association. As that engine increases its power, it has attracted the attention of legislative leaders, who clearly are getting nervous.

Some legislators have floated to lobbyists and education advocates that the priority issue at the Legislature next January will be increasing the weighted pupil unit, a base measure that would mean more money to education and, hence, more possibility for teacher raises and lower class sizes.

Such a priority seems out of character for this Legislature and some are skeptical it is a ploy to appease the UEA and entice its focus away from the petition drive.

Another development was a carrot thrown to the religious organizations recently by legislative leaders. Church representatives were upset about a provision in the gun bill passed in the last session requiring churches to post notices at their buildings that guns are not welcome. The churches want an outright ban of guns from their buildings without having to post a tacky sign addressing the issue at their places of worship.

Last week, those church representatives were told by legislative leaders that perhaps the bill was misinterpreted. The legislators said they have asked the Office of Legislative Research and General Counsel and the Utah Attorney General's Office to study the wording. The legislators say now the posting should be voluntary, not mandatory.

Backroom Smoke

Utah's U.S. Sen. Bob Bennett has been named deputy chairman of the Republican Senatorial Campaign Committee and will chair the Republican Senatorial Dinner Oct. 7 in Washington. His goal is to raise \$4 million, which will be shepherded to GOP senatorial candidates whose races are deemed competitive. Bennett says the committee will not waste money on sure winners or sure losers. Rudolph Giuliani, expected to be the Republican candidate in New York against First Lady Hillary Clinton, will get no money, says Bennett, because Giuliani already is getting plenty

of support due to the "anti-Clinton" factor. Sen. Orrin Hatch, who also is running for president, doesn't need any of the committee's money for his Utah senate race either, says Bennett ...

The Republican National Committee is upset. While Republicans have been dominating in state and federal races across the country in recent years, the one political arena where they have failed is in the state attorney general races. So, just like the Republican Governors Association that was formed in 1963, the Republican Attorneys General Association was spawned this month. Republicans currently have 31 of the 50 governorships and they hold majorities in both houses of Congress. But of the 43 states where the attorney general is elected, only 12 have Republican AGs. South Carolina Attorney General Charlie Condon is chairman of the new group, which hopes to make inroads in states that generally are Republican but have a Democratic attorney general, such as Utah ...

Former House Speaker Mel Brown, who opted not to seek re-election to his speaker's position in the midst of news reports that he had improper conversations with a lobbyist, is considering running for Salt Lake County mayor next year when the county goes to a mayor-council form of government. He would join an already crowded field of hopefuls, including County Commissioners Mary Callaghan and Brent Overson, County Sheriff Aaron Kennard, County Recorder Nancy Workman and 1998 Democratic County Commission candidate Karen Crompton ...

Former Salt Lake County Commissioner Randy Horiuchi generated some publicity earlier this year when he went to work as a lobbyist for Tetris, the company which Horiuchi the year prior voted to approve as the county's legislative lobbyist. Horiuchi, who also works for Deseret Certified Development Co., which administers SBA loans, has left Tetris. He says he was carrying two full-time jobs and recently became the father of a newborn girl. So it got to be too much.