

Beacon Hill Byline by Mary Rogeness

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The Gun Bill

The love-hate relationship that Americans have with firearms has just presented the legislature another bout to referee. The revolution that founded our nation, the pioneer history of our society and the urbanization of our times have combined to challenge the lawmakers to deal with divergent demands. The right to bear arms and the fear of firearms are again in conflict. The Massachusetts Senate and House have each passed bills on the topic that are now in a conference committee.

Time is short in the legislative session, and we have no assurance that a compromise bill will be achieved. I'd like to write today about the safety measures advocated by the House of Representatives, both in our version of the "gun bill" and as a budget amendment. They are important safety measures whether or not they are enacted into law. If you, your family or your neighbors have guns in your homes, I ask you to observe these precautions.

If you have a gun in your home, keep it unloaded and secured with a trigger locking device. Trigger locks are becoming standard accessory for newly purchased weapons, and they can be added to older guns.

A debater in last month's House session told of a fatal shooting that resulted from two boys playing with a gun taken from the parents' hiding place. The boys believed the gun to be unloaded. A parent's gun is always off limits to children in a household, but that prohibition naturally makes the gun a target of curiosity. Any law that falls short of confiscation of all privately owned guns will leave that temptation in the minds of children. A trigger lock might have saved that child's life.

In the budget debate, the House accepted an amendment that requires guns to be stored with trigger locking devices. In addition, the House budget offered a tax credit for the purchase of trigger locks, effectively making them free to gun owners. The budget has not been reported from its conference committee, so we do not know if the provisions will make it into law. With or without the force of law, trigger locks are not expensive, and they add another level of safety for gun storage.

Earlier in this century, guns were an ordinary tool in many households. When my father reminisced about World War II, he talked of the importance to our Army of the soldiers who reported for duty with ready marksmanship they had developed as civilian hunters and sportsmen. Now your youngsters are more likely to be raised playing video games.

When I served on the Longmeadow School Committee, Center School had an unused shooting range in the basement, a relic from days when the town fielded a team of marksmen. Now we talk of banning the guns used in competition.

Guns are not part of my personal life, but gun safety is part of my professional responsibility. A constituent wrote to me last week asking, "What do we do now to help our community understand their responsibilities? Can we count on your help?" This column is my attempt to help, to implore the gun owners who read these words to secure your guns, unloaded and separated from ammunition, inaccessible to anyone who does not have your permission to use them.