

S.L. COUPLE TAKES UP FIGHT FOR STRICT GUN-CONTROL LAWS

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Gang members who came to Capitol Hill for the Legislature's special session received the star treatment - private audiences with the governor, invitations to speak before lawmakers and interviews by the media.

Everyone, it seemed, wanted to hear what the tough-talking, teenage gang members had to say about new punishments that include penalties for minors caught with a handgun. Lawmakers didn't pay much attention to a neatly dressed middle-aged couple lobbying for even stricter gun control, the parents of a college senior shot to death 11/2 years ago at Indiana University by another student.

Ron and Norma Molen circulated general information on handgun deaths and told the story of how their youngest child, 22-year-old Steven, died after trying to intervene in the fatal shooting of a girlfriend by a stalker.

The stalker, a 29-year-old German graduate student at another university, carried two guns. One was wrestled away by Steven after his girlfriend was shot. The gunman used the second to kill Steven and later himself.

The Molens said they favored gun control long before the April 1992 incident. But after the death of their son, a highly praised student and published fiction writer, they decided to begin speaking out.

``It's painful. What it does is bring it all back," said Ron Molen. ``But Steven rushed to the girl's defense and was shot. We sort of feel an obligation to say something and not be cowardly about it."

On Mother's Day this year, Norma Molen addressed a gun-control rally in Washington, D.C. The couple had written their representatives in Congress, seeking support for the Brady bill, which would mandate a five-day waiting period for gun buyers nationwide.

Both support Salt Lake Mayor Deedee Corradini's efforts to enforce a similar waiting period in the city. But both say a waiting period for gun buyers is just a start.

Their list is long. Gun licensing, similar to a vehicle or deer-hunting license. Taxes on gun sales, to offset the cost of treating gun victims. Liability insurance, so gun owners have to pay for their mistakes. "We feel more control is necessary. It's pretty obvious why," Norma Molen said. "It's going to come sooner or later. If it comes sooner, more lives will be saved."

Lawmakers, however, aren't ready to listen. Although they did toughen the state law to help keep handguns away from youths under 18, they refused to endorse Salt Lake's waiting period for 18-to-25-year-old gun buyers.

Molen tried to talk his state senator into amending the anti-handgun bill to include 18-to-21-year-olds. Sen. Bob Steiner, D-Salt Lake, said he wouldn't have been able to get the amendment passed.

"I'm willing to settle for what I can get. I want to be realistic," Steiner, who sponsored the bill, said. "I just feel badly I can't do more for them immediately."

Steiner said the gang members got the attention of lawmakers. "They made a great impression," he said. "Most of us hadn't seen a gang person in the flesh."

Besides the gang members, lawmakers also heard from Gov. Mike Leavitt, who put gangs on the special session agenda and submitted his own package of bills including a handgun law supported by the National Rifle Association.

Seated in a book- and art-filled living room with a sweeping view of the Salt Lake Valley the day after the special session ended, the Molens said they will continue to fight for gun control.

What would their son, himself a gun-control advocate, think of their efforts? "Steve was a cynical child and didn't have a lot of faith in government. We used to argue a lot about that," Ron Molen said.