

LET PEOPLE MAKE GUN CONTROL DECISION

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When in doubt, let the people vote.

That's the newest idea floating around state Capitol hallways concerning the controversial and heated debate over concealed weapons in schools. Republicans in the Utah House and Senate are struggling over how to deal with the matter.

Several leaders say if they could just focus the issues clearly before the public, things would be much easier.

They believe the news media, including the Deseret News, are stuck on concealed weapons in schools, fanning the flames for no good reason.

They accuse the Democrats of doing the same thing, but they're disappointed that the media is, in their minds, helping the minority party in a "false" crusade.

Looking for some way to solve this issue -- and sometimes throwing angry eyes at their own GOP governor Mike Leavitt for his part in the process -- GOP lawmakers are considering placing on the 2000 ballot a guns-in-schools referendum.

Don't know what to do politically?

Drop back 10 yards and punt.

Let the other guy have the ball for a while.

I don't see this as a cowardly way out, although many Democrats do.

The key to such a move, however, is how the referendum is worded.

In any plan, I believe it's wise to give citizens, who have serious reasons to believe that their lives are in danger, to carry a concealed weapon in most places.

To some, this may sound nuts.

But I've heard the arguments before and give them some credence:

If an angry and disturbed husband or boyfriend wants to harm the woman he supposedly loves, and he knows she has a concealed weapons permit and carries a firearm, where is he going to confront her?

If she's banned from taking the gun to church, maybe he waits for her there.

If she can't carry the gun to school, he plans his attack on school grounds. at parent-teacher night.

The problem comes, I believe, when these rare -- but very serious circumstances -- are blown up into the general public.

There are very few reasons for taking a gun to school, says Leavitt. Just the argument that you should be able to do that because it's your right, with no other reason, has to be weighted against other factors.

And for the most part, all guns should be banned there.

Many people ask why would anyone take a gun to church?

And leaders of the LDS Church and other denominations say that churches should be places of sanctuary where the problems of the world are kept away for a short time.

So, how do legislators deal with this problem?

First, many say there is no real problem, only a contrived one aimed at playing to the desires and fears of the general public.

No concealed weapons holder has ever brought a gun to school and caused an incident, the gun-rights advocates like to point out.

True.

While there have been some minor incidents -- where a teacher or visitor brought a gun to school and it was seen by students -- no one can cite an incident where someone was physically harmed.

Senate President Lane Beattie's reasoning fits in here.

Beattie says he's worked through the various scenarios with gun rights and gun control advocates. He sees it like this:

A person brings a gun to school -- legally or illegally -- and takes over a classroom. If a teacher or administrator is not armed, children could be killed, with nothing being done until police arrive.

If a teacher/administrator is armed, then what do they do? Beattie asks.

Pull the weapon but not shoot? That could incite the troubled person to violence when if he weren't threatened he could be talked out of the situation by experts with no one harmed. Pull the weapon and shoot? The troubled person, a child or teacher could be shot. And shot in front of other students.

Not pull the weapon? Then whether it was there or not doesn't matter.

Beattie says he just sees no real way where having a concealed weapon in the school ends up as a good thing. The risk to the kids and personnel is too great. Now, having a law enforcement officer in the school is a different matter, he says. A highly trained person with a gun may very well be a good thing.

While some lawmakers feel they can make rational and reasonable decisions about guns-in-schools, others believe the issue has taken on a life of its own.

And with no political way out, it may just be best to throw it in the lap of citizens in 2000.

