

NRA member favors automatic weapons ban

By Tim Richard
Staff writer

The latest gun regulation bills are sponsored by a gun-owning lawmaker and endorsed by a committee chair who belongs to the National Rifle Association.

They would ban fully automatic weapons in Michigan.

"I'm a gun owner and ardent supporter of Second Amendment rights," said the sponsor, Rep. James Kosteva, D-Canton.

"It's easier to defend (gun ownership) when we've removed access to weapons with no sporting purpose whatever. Why wait until another Stockton, Calif., incident?" said Kosteva.

THE BILLS will go to the House Tourism, Fisheries and Wildlife Committee, chaired by Jerry C. Bartnik, D-Temperance, the NRA member who endorsed it.

"A few years ago, you would never see my name associated with this kind of bill," said Bartnik. He changed his mind because of

"the fatal link between these kinds of weapons and the spread of drugs throughout our state."

The Kosteva bills have been endorsed by House Democratic leaders Lewis Dodak of Birch Run and Pat Capaldi of Drummond Island. Kosteva expects bipartisan support.

One Kosteva bill is a revision of House Bill 4624 (see chart). The sponsor, Rep. Vincent Porreca, D-Trenton, withdrew it from consideration after a buzzsaw of opposition. Porreca's name is on several strict gun control measures.

Other bills in Lansing would treat inoperable pistols as if they were operable and require training of pistol buyers.

THE NEW package of bills by Kosteva would:

- Require a criminal history check and mental health background declaration of persons purchasing firearms. (It appears similar to SB 325, sponsored by Sen. Nick Smith, R-Hillsdale.)
- Ban shotguns capable of accepting am-

munition drums or magazine clips of more than five rounds. "They call them 'street sweepers.' They fire 20 rounds in a few seconds. They serve absolutely no sporting purpose. They are a kill-and-maim type weapon," Kosteva said.

• Prohibit "conversion kits" used to convert a semiautomatic to automatic firing. (A semiautomatic gun requires a separate trigger movement for each shot; an automatic weapon fires continuously as long as one squeezes the trigger.)

• Repeal a law allowing individuals to buy and possess automatic weapons.

REP. WILLIS Bullard Jr., R-Highland, is sponsoring a bill to treat inoperable handguns the same as working guns for purposes of sentencing. His HB 5003 is locked in the House Judiciary Committee.

"There was a Court of Appeals case where someone was let off because the gun wasn't working," said Bullard.

That case reversed nearly 20 years of case precedent that an inoperable handgun which can easily be made operable requires the

same pistol permit, according to Prof. David G. Cotter of the Cooley Law School in Lansing.

Bullard said his intent is not to require licensing of inoperable pistols but to allow a judge to sentence users as if they were operable pistols.

House Judiciary Chairman Perry Bullard (no kin of Willis), D-Ann Arbor, scoffed that HB 5003 "a Republican loaf . . . It loads prisons without doing anything about the cause — loaded, real guns."

Replied Willis Bullard, "That's what he says about all criminal legislation."

LEGISLATORS LIKE the sound of the pistol training bill (HB 4163), but find problems with setting up classes.

"The sheriff's association didn't want to do it," said Perry Bullard, who co-sponsored it and handled it in the judiciary committee. "We couldn't get a floor vote. They sent it back to committee."

It's not a bad idea," agreed Kosteva, "if it's not overly costly to implement."

Willis Bullard added that lawmakers "on

a lot of issues are not concerned about the bill itself but where it might lead." He said it would have to be "meaningful training" by a "responsible group."

"There's still argument over the effectiveness of driver training," Bullard said.

TWO BILLS favored by gun owners and the Michigan United Conservation Clubs have made it through one chamber of the Legislature.

In 1988, the Senate passed, 26-9, a bill by Chris Dingell, D-Trenton, to prohibit local units of government from enacting ordinances more restrictive than state and federal firearms laws. It died in the House Judiciary Committee.

The House gave 77-15 approval to the MUCC-backed shooting range protection bill HB 5055 would protect shooting ranges from lawsuits over noise in cases where the range was in operation prior to residential development — the situation in several suburban areas. The Senate Judiciary Committee reported it out to the Senate floor.

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