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A question of reciprocity

State lawmakers should approve concealed carry bill

The criteria to qualify for a concealed handgun license vary widely from state to state. Oregon's standards should be tougher, but they at least include restrictions barring applicants with felony convictions, dishonorable military discharges and diagnosed mental illnesses, and require completion of a handgun-safety course.

The state Senate is considering a bill, House Bill 3093, sponsored by Rep. Bill Post, R-Keizer, that would allow concealed handgun licensees from other states to also carry in Oregon. This newspaper has opposed similar bills in the past because they would have required that Oregon honor out-of-state concealed carry permits issued by states with glaringly inadequate standards and dysfunctional permitting systems. But HB 3093, unlike its predecessors, includes requirements that should ensure that out-of-state licensees at least meet Oregon's primary requirements.

A version approved earlier by the House narrowly focused on handgun competency requirements and would have required the state to honor licenses from states with standards less restrictive than Oregon's. That flaw was remedied by Sen. Floyd Prozanski, the Eugene Democrat who sponsored the recently approved measure expanding background checks. Prozanski introduced a successful amendment that would require that the state only grant reciprocity to licensees from states with standards that at least equal to Oregon's requirements. (Some tweaking may be necessary to avoid excluding states with standards that differ on only minor technical points.)

With that essential change, lawmakers, including those who have long resisted reciprocity, should feel free to support HB 3093 with confidence that the state would open its doors to out-of-state license holders whose qualifications meet or exceed those of Oregon's 180,000 licensees.

HB 3093 has the support of the National Rifle Association, which also supports a far less desirable bill in Congress that would allow concealed handgun licenses to be honored throughout the country.

The NRA calls the Constitutional Concealed Carry Reciprocity Act a "much-needed solution to a real problem for gun owners." But it has the same fundamental flaw as earlier versions of Oregon's license reciprocity bill and would force Oregon and other states to let people with

concealed-weapon permits issued elsewhere carry their guns without restriction across state lines.

Sen. Jon Cornyn, R-Texas, a major supporter of the bill, argues that guns should be honored across state lines in the same way that driver's licenses are. That ignores the unique and far more extensive risks posed by guns in the wrong hands. It also ignores the vast disparity in licensing requirements from state to state.

States, which are responsible for maintaining public safety within their borders, should not be forced to recognize concealed weapon permits issued by states with weaker standards. For example, Oregon, which requires applicants to complete a handgun-safety course, should not be required to recognize licensees from South Dakota, which has no such requirement.

Congress should not pass a law that allows officials in South Dakota, Texas or Alaska to set the standards on who may carry concealed weapons in Oregon, California or Washington. What sponsors of the federal bill decry as a patchwork quilt of state requirements actually reflects the need and right of individual states to set standards that address their unique character, problems and values.

Federal lawmakers should resist pressure from the gun lobby and reject the federal reciprocity act, while their Oregon counterparts should support the far more sensible HB 3093.