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Lawmakers pass concealed carry rules

Measure spelling out who could carry and where heads to governor

By Ray Long and Bill Ruthhart, Chicago Tribune reporters

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SPRINGFIELD

Illinois lawmakers yesterday approved a set of rules to spell out who can carry concealed guns and where they can be carried as the state seeks to meet a court-imposed deadline to allow the practice.

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The bill represented a compromise that drew complaints from gun rights backers who wanted fewer restrictions and gun control supporters who wanted tighter regulations.

"We worked really hard on this bill to come up with something that we think everybody can live with but probably everybody won't be happy with," said sponsoring Sen. Gary Forby, D-Benton. "But it's something we need to do."

Besides passing a budget, enacting concealed carry legislation loomed as the other deadline-driven, must-do issue during the session that came to a close Friday. In December, a federal appeals court threw out the state's long-standing ban and gave lawmakers until June 9 to craft regulations.

The version that's headed to the governor would ban guns from a host of places, including CTA and Metra buses, casinos, stadiums, schools, bars, parks and festivals. Supporters acknowledged the bill would allow people to carry concealed weapons in restaurants where alcohol is served but pointed to tougher penalties for carrying while intoxicated.

A \$150 concealed weapons permit valid for five years would be issued by the Illinois State Police to applicants 21 and older. Law enforcement could object, and those denied could appeal to a seven-person board designed to have members with credentials such as former judge or FBI agent. A person would have to complete 16 hours of training before getting a gun. A series of provisions were designed to prevent people with mental health problems from getting guns.

The legislation would allow a gun owner to travel from one county to another without worrying about different local laws. People could carry a loaded gun in their car and leave it there, stored out of sight, if they couldn't carry it into a building. Chicago's assault weapons ban would remain in place, though towns without one would no longer be able to approve one under the legislation.

The first hurdle was the Senate, where debate captured the state's regional divides.

"We're not there yet on this bill, not even close," said Sen. Dan Kotowski, D-Park Ridge, who said the 16 hours of training required in the bill was not enough.

"This bill is for the common good of all citizens, those who live in our dense cities, those who live in our rural areas. It's time to put this issue to rest," said Sen. William Haine, D-Alton.

The Senate quickly passed the bill 45-12-1. The House vote was 89-28. The bill required a three-fifths vote in both chambers, the higher bar needed when bills affect larger cities with home-rule powers.

Some lawmakers said they didn't like the final product but had to vote for it because the deadline loomed.

"Don't let your constituents go off the cliff. This is a historic day for law-abiding gun owners in this state," said sponsoring Rep. Brandon Phelps, D-Harrisburg.

A spokeswoman for Gov. Pat Quinn said the governor would review the bill when it reaches his desk.

Also Friday, lawmakers approved a bill sponsored by Sen. Kwame Raoul, D-Chicago, that aims to close what gun control supporters call a loophole. Private sale and transfers now would require a seller to verify that a gun buyer's firearm owner's identification card has not been revoked. The measure also requires a gun owner to report lost or stolen firearms to police within 72 hours.

The Senate, however, defeated legislation to ban the sale of high-capacity magazines — a proposal Quinn and Senate President John Cullerton had touted with parents of Sandy Hook Elementary School victims who appeared in Chicago and Springfield.

Before adjourning Friday night, the House and Senate also approved Mayor Rahm Emanuel's plan for a McCormick Place and Navy Pier overhaul that includes a new stadium for DePaul University basketball. The same bill contained provisions Quinn sought to spur development of a third airport in far south suburban Peotone. A major gambling expansion bill that included a Chicago casino failed to gain traction amid concerns from the governor and questions about how to divide the revenue.

Lawmakers also put the finishing touches on a more than \$35 billion operations budget that keeps school funding flat, pays for promised state worker raises and cuts programs for seniors.

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