

**[NYSRPA-alert] Battle to resume over gun control**

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For years, they were the state Legislature's evergreens: measures repeatedly passed by the Democrat-controlled Assembly, only to be blocked in the Republican-dominated Senate. But with both chambers now controlled by Democrats, several perennials are sprouting in both houses.

The budget cycle that ended earlier this month brought about Rockefeller drug law reform, an income tax hike for the rich and an expansion of the bottle law. While gay marriage remains a question mark, lawmakers are now poised to take up another evergreen: gun control.

The annual battle over the issue kicks off today, when the Assembly — as it has done for several years — is expected to pass several measures that would tighten restrictions on gun ownership.

With a 68-seat margin in the Assembly (109 to 41), Democrats should have no problem passing initiatives to "microstamp" firearms in order to create an identifying print on fired cartridges. Also up for debate are tighter restrictions on gun retailers and a move to require people to renew handgun permits every five years.

Once those bills pass in the Assembly, gun control advocates will set their sights on the Senate and the Democrats' newly minted two-seat majority (32 to 30).

"We are hoping for progress in the Senate," said Jackie Hilly, executive director of New Yorkers for Gun Control.

But Sen. Eric Schneiderman, D-Manhattan/ Bronx, who is leading the effort in the Senate, said that hope may be premature, even if the measures pass by heavy margins in the Assembly.

"We're still assessing which bills have the strongest support in the Senate," he said.

Gun owners, Schneiderman conceded, have legitimate concerns about licensing issues,

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including the seemingly arbitrary differences in handgun permit procedures from one county to another.

While gun control supporters may not be overwhelmed with Schneiderman's measured response, the issue also can put Republicans on the spot — especially in light of the April 3 tragedy in Binghamton, where Jiverly Wong used his legally licensed handgun to go on a shooting spree that left 14 people dead.

Upstate lawmakers will have to walk a fine line between angering hunters and gun owners and appearing insensitive to events like the Binghamton killings.

"Any tragedy does have an effect on legislation," said Jake McGuigan, government relations director for the National Shooting Sports Foundation, which represents gun and ammunition manufacturers.

"The concept might not be a bad concept, but I think there are a lot of flaws," Sen. Tom Libous, whose district includes Binghamton, said of the five-year license renewal plan.

This wouldn't be the first time a Republican lawmaker was on the spot regarding gun control.

Sen. Marty Golden, R-Brooklyn, last year made an abrupt about-face on the microstamping measure, supporting and then opposing it as the bill moved into the Senate last year.

Insiders say that Golden came under election-year pressure to withhold support for a law that could anger the Republican base.

On the other side of the aisle, upstate Democrats in districts with lots of hunters — such as Sen. Darrel Aubertine of Cape Vincent — might be hard-pressed to support gun control measures as well.

To counter that, Assemblywoman Michelle Schimel, D-Long Island, who is sponsoring the microstamping bill in the chamber, has been reaching out to law enforcement groups for support, noting that the technology is primarily used in crime-solving.

"A lot of upstate people have come on board," said Schimel.

"My hope," Schneiderman said, "is that we're going to be able to break out of the absolute gridlock on this issue."

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