

NRA, states at odds on gun control bills

WASHINGTON (AP) — A recent defeat in Virginia and a rebuke from President Clinton suggests the gun lobby, while still a powerful force, may be facing some of its toughest fights in years.

Clinton on Monday criticized the National Rifle Association, the nation's premier gun advocacy group, for opposing certain gun controls. His support of gun control proponents gives them a major ally in their fight for a national waiting period for handgun purchases.

Gun control backers predict passage in Congress of the so-called Brady Bill that would establish the handgun waiting period. The measure had majority backing in both the House and Senate last year but was opposed by President Bush. It died after being attached to a broader crime bill.

In the states, however, the picture is less clear. During the past week, Virginia adopted new handgun restrictions. But one chamber of the New Jersey legislature voted to repeal a ban on assault rifles.

Also, as the tense standoff in Waco, Texas, unfolded between authorities and an armed religious cult, Texas Lt. Gov. Bob Bullock said his state, long opposed to gun control, should consider banning "military-type assault weapons."

But in Colorado, the NRA won a court case Friday challenging Denver's ban on semiautomatics.

"There's a lot of activity out there in the states," NRA spokesman Jim Baker said.

The vote in the Virginia General Assembly to limit handgun purchases to one a month was a setback for the NRA.

But the NRA fared better in New Jersey, where the Assembly voted to override Gov. Jim Florio's veto of legislation to reverse a ban on the sale, possession and manufacture of semiautomatic weapons.

"It's a landmark message that gun control schemes are useless and out of step with real anti-crime measures," said George McNeill of the NRA Institute for Legislative Action.

An override vote is pending in the New Jersey Senate, and Clinton's remarks Monday appeared aimed at rallying support for Florio.

"I don't believe that everybody in America needs to be able to buy a semiautomatic or an automatic weapon built only for the purpose of killing people," the president said. Clinton called it an "error" for the NRA to oppose restrictions on assault weapons.

There are heated debates in several other states as well.

In Missouri, for example, the NRA supports a measure that would make it legal to carry a concealed firearm with a permit. The state House passed a version last year but it died in the Senate. An amended version is pending in the Senate.

The NRA and its biggest rival, Handgun Control Inc., also are fighting over concealed weapons measures in Texas, Arkansas and Wyoming.

Another hot issue is whether adult owners should be punished if children gain access to their weapons.

Florida adopted such a law after a special legislation session in 1989 and 10 states have followed with their own versions.

Socialite gets life sentence for slaying

TUSCALOOSA, Ala. (AP) — A socialite was convicted and sentenced to life in prison Wednesday in the slaying of her millionaire husband, a crime prosecutors say she concocted with her twin sister.

Betty Wilson, 47, was sentenced to life without parole about an hour after the jury returned its verdict.

Prosecutors contended she and her sister hired a handyman to kill 55-year-old Dr. Jack Wilson so she could inherit his \$6.3 million estate.

Defense attorneys said the man killed Wilson on his own while burglarizing the couple's home.

Mrs. Wilson's twin sister, Peggy Lowe of Talladega, was free on bond and awaits trial on a capital murder trial.

James D. White was arrested May 26, four days after Wilson was beaten and stabbed to death. He told police the twins agreed to pay him \$5,000 for the slaying. They were arrested the next day.


Following the murder, Mrs. Wilson admitted a string of affairs that became an issue in her nine-day trial. Several of her friends testified that Mrs. Wilson talked about having him killed as early as 1986.

Mrs. Lowe did take the stand. She said that she and her sister were trying to help White at a time when he was broke and despondent. She denied the money she gave him was part of a murder contract.

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