

Senate Democrats Miscalculate on a Group of Bills

Written by Rich Miller

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serious overreach by gun-control advocates derailed bills. The gun groups claimed the bills would result in a ban on a vast array of commonly used weapons and would unconstitutionally restrict gun-owner rights.

The legislation was clearly unpassable as written, and even some gun-control lobbyists were less than enthused about the task they were handed. A prominent pro-gun-control senator said privately that some aspects of the legislation were so broadly written that they would have to be removed if there were any hope of passage in the future. He said he was not involved in the bill drafting and didn't even know who was.

As a result, Senate President John Cullerton, a staunch gun opponent, said last week that he would "absolutely" work with gun-rights groups on a compromise that includes a court mandate to pass a concealed-carry law. But he could be negotiating from weakness now that his attempts to ram through sweeping gun-control provisions have failed.

A bill containing state spending authorization for construction, new Department of Children & Family Services caseworkers, workers' comp claims, and education grants went nowhere after a revolt by rank-and-file members, mainly in the Black Caucus.

Black Caucus members withheld their votes because a bill by Senator Mattie Hunter (D-Chicago) to set up a revolving-loan program for minority road contractors has gone nowhere in the House. The proposal passed the Senate but has been sitting in the House Rules Committee pretty much ever since.

Some members were also upset that \$12 million cut from the state's mental-health budget wasn't restored. With all the talk of gun control in the wake of the Connecticut school massacre, there was no real discussion about shoring up the state's mental-health system, so the revolt against the spending bill intensified.

Last year when the state hiked the cigarette tax by almost a dollar a pack, the tobacco industry cut a deal to pass a bill that limited appeal bonds. Right now, state law mandates that bonds be posted equal to one and a half times a judgment on certain cases before the ruling can be appealed. That resulted in a required \$12-billion appeal bond years ago when Philip Morris lost a case involving Marlboro Lights. The appeal bond was lowered after negotiations, but the company has been fighting ever since to get something into law. The House passed a bill last year, but Senate President Cullerton, a visceral anti-tobacco legislator, bottled it up. It passed last week after the trial lawyers were given a neat little provision that guaranteed them higher contingency fees on big medical-malpractice cases.

Rich Miller also publishes Capitol Fax (a daily political newsletter) and [CapitolFax.com](http://www.CapitolFax.com).