

THE NEWBERG GRAPHIC

Nov. 2 guest opinion: Newberg School District guilty of unlawful gun policies

District is illegally banning holders of CHLs from carrying guns on campuses

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You may have heard of a recent Oregon court ruling that said the state university system could not adopt rules banning people who have concealed handgun licenses (CHL) from carrying firearms on campus. Unfortunately the Newberg School District didn't get the message and is refusing to change a similar policy.

The school facilities policy lists "use or possession of firearms" as a prohibited activity on district property. There are no exceptions, not for after-hours, non-school-related activities, nor for law enforcement officers. I'm told that armed police have been seen on Newberg school property, apparently violating district policy.

State law is clear on this issue: Anyone with a valid Oregon CHL is legally allowed to have guns on school property. This state law dates back to 1969.

Before I hear hootin' and hollerin' from anti-gun "school safety" advocates, think about this. What is the real effect of banning law-abiding citizens from carrying guns at any location? Unless it's a place under continuous armed guard, such policies serve as an open invitation for criminals and mentally unstable individuals to do maximum harm. Thankfully, horrible events like this have not happened in this district, yet.

Another potential problem, however, is an expensive lawsuit. We know the Newberg School District budget is very tight, class sizes are going up and it's hard to provide critical educational services for our students. It's fiscally irresponsible to risk spending thousands of dollars in court defending unlawful policies. The university system had to divert \$50,000 away from classroom instruction to pay lawyers attempting to preserve similar rules.

In the recent decision against the universities, the Oregon Court of Appeals upheld the intent of the law passed by the Oregon Legislature in the mid-1990s, which basically says only state lawmakers can establish policies restricting firearms, not local governments like school districts.

Legislators didn't want a patchwork of local ordinances on gun rights and believed it was better to have uniform policies enacted statewide. A few years ago even the Oregon School Boards Association drafted a resolution declaring the current state law allows people with CHLs to lawfully carry weapons on school property.

When I recently learned about the Newberg policy I asked district representatives if they would please reconsider. They replied that the school board discussed the issue and is not making any changes at this time. Perhaps members of the community should urge them take another look.

Again, it is not the people who have gone through the process to obtain a CHL that school board members should be concerned about. Instead, they should be worried about the criminals who don't care about rules on a piece of paper.

Surely, guns in schools will continue to be a topic of discussion in the Legislature. I will continue to fight for Second Amendment rights and our system of justice — where even our governments follow the law. It is my hope that the Newberg School District board will also do the right thing and change their policies.

State Rep. Kim Thatcher represents House District 25

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