

Signs would warn border crossers

By Annmarie Timmins / Concord Monitor staff

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Excerpts from article

A bill that would put warning signs alongside New Hampshire's roads into Massachusetts would do more than alert travelers that Massachusetts has stricter gun, seat belt and helmet laws, supporters said yesterday. The signs, some said, would also remind Massachusetts residents their civil rights are limited at home.

State tourism and economic officials urged lawmakers to defeat the bill, saying they feared the signs, which would say "Warning: Massachusetts Border 500 feet," would set an unwelcoming, hostile tone. The state depends on Massachusetts for tourism and works hard to recruit business over the border, they said.

Evan Nappen, a Concord attorney representing Pro-Gun New Hampshire, wasn't moved by the manners argument.

"Are (Massachusetts residents) going to be insulted that we have a state with more freedoms?" Nappen told the House Public Works and Highway Committee. "They know their laws are bad and they don't want it pointed out..."

Committee members were concerned that while the bill would require the signs be paid for by private businesses and not the state, the state Department of Transportation would have to erect them. They also couldn't get an answer on how many border crossings are not marked now. One of the proposed signs also concerned some.

"We ask people from Massachusetts to come up here and buy our cigarettes, to buy our liquor and to ski on our mountains," Rep. David Campbell, a Democrat from Nashua, told Swinford. "You don't see this in any way killing that relationship?"

Swinford didn't...

Nappen, the attorney for the gun group, thought he had a compelling real-life example to sway the committee. An Iraq war veteran crossed the border in 2008 to visit his girlfriend in Massachusetts forgetting that he was carrying his gun, Nappen said.

The man pulled to the side of the road to text his girlfriend because he was lost and was approached by the police. When the officer saw the man's gun, he charged him with violating Massachusetts's gun laws. These border signs, Nappen said, would protect New Hampshire residents.

Campbell listened, and then realized the man had been arrested in Somerville, which is long past the New Hampshire/Massachusetts border.

"I don't know how a sign would protect someone that deep into Massachusetts," he said.