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OPINION: Editorial

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Gun happy

Measure would trample property rights

Sometimes it seems that National Rifle Association honchos have targeted Florida as the site of a bizarre dare, testing how pistol-whipped the state Legislature really is.

It's almost ridiculously easy to obtain a concealed-weapon permit in Florida. State rangers can't keep campers from toting guns into state parks. Gun ranges don't have to clean up the lead and other toxins they've been pouring into the air, water and soil for years.

The NRA's crowning glory was the so-called "stand your ground" legislation that made shootings legal so long as a person felt threatened and was in a place they had a legal right to be. That law could help defend three Jacksonville men charged with shooting 36-year-old Eric Houk of Pasco County, who died on Interstate 4 after the Daytona 500. Police say the confrontation between Houk and his assailants was sparked by road rage -- one scenario opponents of the "stand your ground" legislation suggested was likely.

The pro-gun lobby has made little effort to prove that loose gun laws make Florida safer. Their tactics rely more on brute force, targeting lawmakers who stand in the way of proposed legislation and amply rewarding their allies. Apparently, it works.

This year, they have a new target: Business owners who don't want guns on their property.

The Senate Criminal Justice Committee is scheduled to consider a bill today dubbed "take your gun to work." A more accurate title is "take your gun almost anywhere you please." The proposal is bad news for Floridians' safety and property rights.

The legislation, proposed by Rep. Dennis Baxley in the state House of Representatives and Sen. Durrell Peaden (with the help of local Sen. Carey Baker) in the Senate, would keep property owners from banning guns in the locked cars of their employees, customers or other people on their property. And it might do more than that.

In an apparent attempt to be coy, the bill refers to firearms as "constitutionally significant private property," and other similarly veiled terms. The lack of directness has some business lobbyists wondering if the ban would also allow people to bring pornography, explosives or noxious chemicals to work as well.

That concern may be speculative, but for many property owners, guns are a big enough problem on their own. The bill would prohibit property owners with parking for employees or the public from banning guns in cars. It would even forbid the property owners from *asking* about guns in cars.

Baxley told The Associated Press his bill is all about protecting employees and others from Big Brother intrusions into their affairs. He points out that the provisions of the law apply only to guns locked securely in glove compartments and trunks.

But the bill would allow guns to be taken out of locked storage for "lawful defensive purposes." Combine that

provision with the "stand your ground" law signed last year, and you've got trouble. No wonder the state's business lobby is vocally opposed to this legislation. State lawmakers should finally find the guts to say no to the small but powerful gun lobby.