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LAX LAWS, LOOSE GUNS

FLORIDIANS CAN KEEP UNSECURED FIREARMS A TARGET FOR THIEVES, WHO OFTEN USE THEM TO KILL

designed in part to track stolen guns.

Supported by sheriffs and police chiefs, the proposed computer database would have recorded all items received by pawnshops, allowing police to search statewide for stolen property. Police in one Florida county have no way now of checking other counties' pawnshops for stolen property without making telephone calls or visits.

The NRA claimed the database amounted to gun registration, something it opposes. The program remains on hold, and the Legislature has shifted its funding to an anti-terrorism database.

'IT MAKES ME SICK'

Gun owners react as differently as their reasons for owning a gun when they learn their stolen firearm was used in a crime.

More than nine years after Larry Harris' gun was stolen at a wedding reception from a Jeep that belonged to his son, the Polk County businessman recalls nearly weeping after being told it had been used in a murder.

In November 1992, the 9 mm pistol was used to kill two young men and wound a third in a cow pasture outside Kissimmee.

"I'm sick, truthfully," Harris said. "I wish I'd never seen, heard of or gotten the gun. I'm sure they would have gotten a gun somewhere, but it makes me sick."

Kerry Cunningham of Umatilla, however, said he doesn't apologize for leaving his .22-caliber revolver in an unlocked shed, where it was stolen and used in a 1999 Mount Dora bank robbery that left a bank teller dead and a second teller's spine shattered.

"It's not like I took off and left the damned thing open," he said of the shed. "Just like if you were to turn your back and you had some friends over, would you think they would take some things from you?"

"I have no remorse about the situation that happened," he said. "I bless the family that lost that one lady. They have my sympathies."

Former United Southern Bank teller Marishia Scott, shot in the incident, remains paralyzed from the neck down. She urges gun owners to think about what can happen when they store their guns.

"Certainly, it's an ever-growing problem in Florida that owners of handguns don't make sure they're properly secure," said Scott's spokesman and attorney, Bryan Crews of Orlando, who recently won a \$26.9 million jury award in her case.

"Obviously, if you don't have access to a weapon, you're not going to be able to hold up a 7-Eleven, a liquor store, jewelry store or bank without stealing one."