

FORUM

From Page 9

and I was surprised by the people who said yes, and I was surprised by the people who said no.

"I think it's scary; I think guns and the things we've been seeing in our society are scary," Rasmussen said. "I voted for this, because the people I contacted were 2 to 1 in favor of this."

Jones said he is concerned about putting too many weapons in school buildings.

"The best solution that I've heard, to date, is that we have each classroom with inside door locks," he said. "And if those classrooms have windows, they should be covered on the inside with some type of mesh."

Jones said he is also concerned with the extra challenges this bill may pose to law enforcement.

"When a police officer responds to something happening at a school, the first thing he looks for is somebody else with a weapon. I'm not comfortable with that," he said.

Becky Rider, who teaches at Vermillion Middle School, asked the lawmakers if they had sought input from students.

"I did, and when they heard you were debating a bill that would allow weapons in schools, my seventh-graders said to me, 'Why?' Our kids are concerned," she said, "but they also understand that

statistically, their chance of being involved in a school shooting is roughly that of being struck by lightning.

"It seems to me we're spending a lot of time on something that has a miniscule chance of happening," Rider said, "and there's a 100 percent chance that the kids in our district are in classrooms that have seen the effects of 8.6 percent cuts in the last few years and maybe that's where you should be spending your energy."

The three legislators responded that they didn't seek input from students.

"I didn't think about asking students because the bill is focused at the local level, which is school boards," Rasmussen said. "I do think hearing what students have to say about this is a good idea, though."

"Nancy has mentioned school boards a couple different times, and I don't remember hearing from any school board members from here," Ring said.

He noted that he was strongly influenced by two people who testified before the Education Committee. Both individuals have long-time military experience; one serves on a school board; the other serves as school superintendent.

"They both gave, I thought, truly compelling testimony that without training, these people are

an accident waiting to happen," Ring said, noting that one of the unintended consequences of this legislation will be an inevitable accidental shooting.

"That really was the reason I voted against this bill," Ring said. "I just think putting guns in school, especially out of the hands of law enforcement officials, is just ridiculous."

Ring and Rasmussen, both newcomers to the state Legislature, told the forum audience that their experience in Pierre has, so far, been positive.

"Being a freshman, I've been very pleased with the atmosphere in the Capitol," Rasmussen said. "Everybody works together well, everybody is respectful and everyone has been very, very helpful in introducing me to how everything works so we can get involved in the process."

"I have to agree with Nancy - the atmosphere is a lot different than what I expected," Ring said, "and as best I can tell, it's a lot different than what it's been for the last couple years."

Jones, who served in the state House of Representatives before being elected to the state Senate last fall, told the forum audience he is encountering new experiences this session, also, thanks mainly to his being a member of the Appropriations Committee.

"We (committee

members) are absolutely, totally isolated from the rest of the Legislature. We start at 7:15 every morning ... we have a briefing from the Legislative Research Council, and at 8 a.m., we go live on the Internet and we have hearings from each department within the government," he said. "We hear what their budget requests are and also their relationship to what the governor requested in his budget address last December."

Jones said the committee adjourns each day at about noon, and members then prepare to take part in the day's legislative session on the House floor at 1 p.m.

Later in the afternoon, after the session has adjourned for the day, it is not unusual for the Appropriations Committee to meet once again to receive additional input, he said.

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