

# Rally focuses on gun bills

## Legislative battle likely this session

### Staff Report

Albany — In a state known for its restrictive gun laws, it's not surprising last month's sportsmen's rally at the state Capitol focused on the seemingly endless battle against tighter gun restrictions.

But the Jan. 25 gathering — the second straight year for the Sportsmen & Outdoor Recreation Legislative Awareness Day — also served as a forum to push for pro-sporting issues, such as more youth hunting opportunities, better ATV access and the recog-

nition of the economic impact of hunting, fishing and trapping in New York.

Sponsored by the New York State Rifle & Pistol Association and hosted by Assembly Minority Leader Brian Kolb, R-Canandaigua, and the Assembly Minority Conference, sportsmen poured into "The Well" of the Legislative Office Building. There, they met with individual lawmakers and heard comments from several speakers, including Chuck Cunningham, director of political affairs for the National Rifle Association.

"It's not just about guns; this fight is

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# Rally

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about freedom," Cunningham said. "It's what our founding fathers fought for and died for. It's what many soldiers and sailors defend even to this day. Our right to keep and bear arms is an NRA opinion; it also happens to be a majority Supreme Court decision and a majority

public opinion."

Sportsmen in New York are gearing up for the anticipated glut of anti-gun bills on the heels of the Arizona shooting of Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords. Already, A1479, introduced in the New York Legislature by Democrat Linda Rosenthal, would change the

definition of "assault weapon" to include firearms commonly used for hunting, such as semi-automatic weapons with thumbhole stocks.

The bill also gives the superintendent of the state police the authority to classify other weapons as assault weapons and designate specific firearms by make and model as assault weapons.

"If gun control reduced crime, New York City and where I work, Washington, D.C., would be safe," Cunningham said. "In fact, they're not. Let's be serious; gun control laws in New York and other states, like California, are very strict and a proven failure."

Cunningham also turned his attention to New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg, who "campaigns around the country to restrict the rights of honest citizens just like you and me under false pretenses. He's not after illegal guns; he's after your guns."

James Rabbia, manager of Remington Arms' Ilion, N.Y., plant in central New York, pointed to the state Legislature's annual push for a microstamping law that would require all handguns sold in New York be equipped with firing pins that could "microstamp" shell casings for identification purposes.

"If microstamping is enacted in New York state, most likely we would not be able to sell product to people living in New York, which is a shame," he said. "And we would not continue to manufacture pistols in New York state."

But there were other topics discussed at the rally in addition to gun legislation. **Bill Schwert**, coordinator of the state's 4-H Shooting Sports Program, said the future of the hunting tradition is at stake and can be secured by exposing youths to hunting earlier. "Let's remove age barriers," he said. "We moved from 16 to 14 for big game. Let's get closer to where the rest of the states are; let's go down to age 12."

**Schwert** said the biggest challenge facing the sport today is retention - "keeping those who shoot, hunt, fish and trap, and then recruitment, which is even more important. My emphasis is on the youth component. Youths are the future of shooting, hunting and our great outdoor conservation mandates



Sen. Roy McDonald, left, chats with Tim Blodgett of Saratoga County.

Photo by Dan Ladd



Sportsmen fill 'The Well' of Albany's Legislative Office Building for the second annual Sportsmen & Outdoor Recreation Legislative Awareness Day.

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that we have in New York state."

Jeff Binga, Region 9 delegate for the New York State Recreational Vehicle Association, said that group is looking for support from other organizations in creating a trail fund bill for maintenance of trails on state and private lands.

Howard Travis, a member of the board of directors of the New York State chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation as well as a past president of that group, said the rally "gives us an opportunity to meet our legislators as well as new ones and establish a dialogue and try to make this a two-way street where we'll try to help you and you'll try to help us. It's just a nice working relationship where we are all sportsmen and we are all about conservation."

Sen. Roy McDonald, R-Troy, urged sportsmen to meet with not only pro-sporting lawmakers but those who aren't necessarily seen as being in the corner of hunters and anglers.

"I'd be seeking out the Assembly members from the metropolitan area and treating them with great respect," he said. "Talk to them and get to know them so they know us. So they don't think we're radical and we don't think they're radical."

Kolb, who noted that fishing, hunting and trapping contribute \$6 billion annually to the state's economy, said the rally will be an annual event.

The rally included over two dozen vendors, from various conservation organizations to area sportsmen's clubs.

In addition to Cunningham's keynote speech, the formal program included a taped presentation from NRA CEO and Executive Vice President Wayne LaPierre, who was the featured speaker last year, as well as remarks by Rabbia; Tom King, president of the New York State Rifle & Pistol Association; Stephen Aldstadt, president of S.C.O.P.E. (Shooters' Committee on Political Education); and **Schwert**.