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Gun bill hypocrisy: Votes do not match rhetoric

EDITORIAL

Last Wednesday's House votes on House Bill 1589, to require background checks for almost all guns sales in New Hampshire, revealed that New Hampshire Democrats are divided about the utility of universal background checks. Despite the party's official bluster about the need for such legislation, House Democrats would not stand up to have the final vote on the bill recorded. Dozens of them wanted to vote against it, but only if they could do so secretly.

During House debate, Republicans moved to turn the bill into a study committee. That motion passed by two votes: 177-175. There are 215 Democrats in the House and 177 Republicans. A lot of Democrats refrained from voting on that motion.

After about two hours of debate, Minority Leader Gene Chandler, R-Bartlett, made a motion to kill the bill, which remained a study committee (one Democrats said was tilted against gun-control). The vote was 215-177. That means that at least 65 Democrats voted to kill the bill. We do not know exactly how many Democrats, or which ones, because there was no roll call vote on the bill. Republicans did not ask for one because they knew they would get the votes to kill it if Democrats could vote against it in secret. They were right.

"I think on this vote people on both sides were somewhat relieved that it wasn't going to be a roll call," Chandler told us in an interview. "I think we gained some people that didn't like this bill."

Last spring, U.S. Sen. Kelly Ayotte voted against a bill to expand federal background checks.

The New Hampshire Democratic Party responded by calling her part of the "far-right fringe" and calling universal background checks "common sense." Last week dozens of House Democrats refused to vote for universal background checks, as Democratic House Speaker Terie Norelli did not press her members to support the bill and Democratic Gov. Maggie Hassan refused to take a position on it. The state Democratic Party did not issue a statement or press release on the vote.

What profiles in courage. They will attack Republicans who oppose universal background checks, then turn around and vote the same way as long as they know no one is looking.