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**State leaders at an impasse ;**

**Ryan prepared to hold lawmakers**

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SPRINGFIELD-Close friends for 25 years, Gov. Ryan and Senate President James "Pate" Philip entered the weekend further apart than ever as their spat over Illinois gun laws showed no signs of ending.

The two planned meetings early Saturday with other legislative leaders, but there appeared little reason to expect this latest round would bring a breakthrough in their weeklong deadlock.

After watching his anti-crime package thrashed on the Senate floor Friday night, the governor sent a defiant message to Philip and his allies.

"I will keep them here Christmas Day if that's what it takes to get something resolved before we go home," said Ryan, a former House speaker who is unaccustomed to losing on the legislative battleground.

With that, the prospect of a ruined holiday in Springfield inched closer to reality for the two leaders, along with 176 other lawmakers caught up in the impasse over how to re-enact Mayor Daley's Safe Neighborhoods Act, struck down by the state Supreme Court this month.

Indeed, the possibility that lawmakers will have to open presents with their loved ones in hotel rooms gives the governor more leverage than even the $ 12 billion in pork projects he controls.

Even the Senate president is not unmindful of the calendar. This is the first Christmas that he and wife Nancy have not gotten a tree together. But such domestic hardship hasn't caused Philip to bend.

In Friday night's 29-18 Senate vote, only seven Republicans broke ranks and supported Ryan. Twenty-two Senate Democrats also backed the plan. Thirty-six votes were needed to get the bill on the governor's desk.

By a 92-30 vote earlier in the day, the House passed the plan and sent it to the Senate.

It would have allowed prosecutors to charge gun owners with a felony if they were caught illegally with weapons. Judges could have imposed a six- to 12-month probation, then given the gun owners the chance to have the charge wiped from their records after a year.

Philip objects to this plan because he thinks the gun owners' records should be cleared immediately and automatically, without input from judges or prosecutors, for those violators with no prior criminal history.

But the real disagreements between the two men are deeper. Theirs is a skirmish rooted in Illinois' incongruous geography.

In the woods of deep southern Illinois, shotguns are the necessary tools of hunters. On the streets of Chicago and East St. Louis, guns are the preferred instruments of murder.

"This is a classic regional difference in the state of Illinois, where one region of the state needs strong law enforcement and the other region of the state has certain people that may get swept up under strong law enforcement," said House Speaker Michael Madigan (D-Chicago), who sides with Ryan.

Philip, a hunter whose summers are spent in the woods of Michigan's Upper Peninsula, has gone to the mat to make sure that Mayor Daley's Safe Neighborhoods Act -- and its provision that illegal gun possession be an automatic felony -- is not put back on the books intact.

Philip wants to make sure that no one driving a sports utility vehicle after a long hunting weekend gets stopped and charged with a felony because a shotgun was within arm's reach.

Throughout the debate, neither Philip nor the National Rifle Association has been able to produce a single case of a hunter being persecuted by an overzealous state's attorney since the law went into effect.

Daley and Ryan have argued the absence of the Safe Neighborhoods Act could mean an early release for scores of prisoners and an increase in street crime.

"This bill gives us the tools we need to keep guns off the street," Daley said. "We experienced a remarkable decline in the number of guns on the street after the Safe Neighbhoods Act took effect in 1995. I expect that decline to continue if this bill becomes law."

But Philip belittled the urgency that Daley and Ryan have attached to re-enacting the law.

"Is there a crisis?" he asked. "I mean, everybody kept saying all these criminals were coming out. They certainly are not coming out. There isn't a crisis."