

Gun background check system riddled with flaws

Major holes in the database

By MARTHA BELLISLE
Associated Press

SEATTLE — Recent mass shootings have spurred Congress to try to improve the nation’s gun background check system that has failed on numerous occasions to keep weapons out of the hands of dangerous people.

The problem with the legislation, experts say, is that it only works if federal agencies, the military, states, courts and local law enforcement do a better job of sharing information with the background check system — and they have a poor track record in doing so. Some of the nation’s most horrific mass shootings have revealed major holes in the database reporting system, including massacres at Virginia Tech in 2007 and at a Texas church last year.

Despite the failures, many states still aren’t meeting key benchmarks with their background check reporting that enable them to receive federal grants similar to what’s being proposed in the current legislation.

“It’s a completely haphazard system — sometimes it works; sometimes it doesn’t,” said Georgetown University law professor Larry Gostin. “When you’re talking about school children’s lives, rolling the dice isn’t good enough.”

In theory, the FBI’s background check database, tapped by gun dealers during a sale, should have a definitive list of people who are prohibited from having guns — people who have been convicted of crimes, committed to mental institutions, received dishonorable discharges or are addicted to drugs.

But in practice, the database is incomplete.

It’s up to local police, sheriff’s offices, the mili-



AP Photo/Seth Perlman
Assault weapons and handguns are seen for sale at Capitol City Arms Supply in Springfield, Ill., in 2013.

tary, federal and state courts, Indian tribes and in some places, hospitals and treatment providers, to send criminal or mental health records to the National Instant Criminal Background Check System, or NICS, but some don’t always do so, or they may not send them in a timely fashion.

Some agencies don’t know what to send; states often lack funds needed to ensure someone handles the data; no system of audits exists to find out who’s not reporting; and some states lack the political will to set up a functioning and efficient reporting process, experts said.

“The system is riddled with opportunities for human error,” said Kristin Brown, co-president of the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence.

A proposal in Congress seeks to establish a structured system for federal agencies to send records to the NICS database. U.S. Sen. John Cornyn of Texas says the legislation — often referred to as “Fix NICS” — will save lives.

“We should start with what’s achievable and what will actually save lives, and that describes the ‘Fix NICS’ bill. It will help prevent dangerous individuals with criminal convictions and a history of mental illness from buying firearms,” the Republican said.

Often left out of the debate in Washington, D.C., is the fact that similar legislation passed after the 2007 Virginia Tech massacre, but many records are still not being sent to the database.

The Justice Department even set up a new grant program that offered states help with their reporting system, but many didn’t even bother to apply. In 2016, only 19 states and one tribe received funds totaling \$15 million. The number of states currently participating is 31.

Several states aren’t eligible for the grant because they haven’t set up a system that allows a person who was prohibited from having a gun due to mental health issues get their rights restored. The National Rifle Association has long pushed for those types of restoration requirements, Brown said.

Important mental health records that would have kept Seung-Hui Cho from getting the guns he used to kill 32 people at Virginia Tech were never entered into NICS. The gunman who killed dozens at a Texas church in November was able to purchase weapons because the Air Force didn’t send his domestic violence conviction to the database.

Kruse hits back on sex misconduct claims

Associated Press

SALEM — Days before an Oregon state senator was due to leave his post over sexual misconduct allegations, the Republican from rural downstate published a newsletter casting himself as a victim of politics.

State Sen. Jeff Kruse of Roseburg had previously announced he was resigning Thursday after an investigation determined he had harassed women with unwelcome physical contact.

But on Friday, he said he resigned without the extent of his due process so as not to distract from the legislative session’s business.

He also made a plea for his legacy to be remembered aside from his swift downfall, which he called a scripted “soap opera” designed for political gain.

The independent investigator in response urged the public to read the report detailing years of inappropriate behavior.

Woman airlifted from Saddle Mountain

The Daily Astorian

The Coast Guard airlifted a woman from Saddle Mountain after she injured her ankle Sunday night.

She was hiking about 2 1/2 miles up the mountain when she slipped on snow. The Coast Guard received the

request for aid and launched an MH-60 Jayhawk helicopter crew shortly before 8 p.m. About 10 minutes later, the crew arrived on the scene and hoisted her into the aircraft.

She was then flown to Air Station Astoria and taken to Columbia Memorial Hospital for treatment.

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