Oregon passes bill to keep guns from stalkers and abusers

By ANDREW SELSKY Associated Press

SALEM — Democrats in the state Legislature pushed through a gun control bill Thursday after they sacrificed a more sweeping one — to the ire of student activists — in a deal with minority Republicans.

The bill senators passed 25-3 is aimed at keeping guns out of the hands of domestic abusers and stalkers. State Sen. Betsy Johnson, D-Scappoose, a frequent opponent of gun control, voted "no."

Gov. Kate Brown told reporters she looks forward to signing what she called "the domestic violence bill" that earlier passed the House.

"We have been able to make incremental progress as I have been governor, and we will continue to do so in a strategic and thoughtful manner," Brown said.

Brown was behind an agreement to drop legislation that would have allowed businesses to raise the firearms purchasing age from 18 to as high as 21, and require safe storage of firearms.

That deal was struck to get the minority Republican senators, who were boycotting the Senate to freeze its activities, back into the chamber to allow passage of an education tax bill. Democrats also ditched a bill that would have limited exemptions for children receiving immunizations as part of the agreement.

Students complained that lawmakers "used our safety like a bargaining chip." Concern about school shootings were heightened after a student walked into a Portland high school classroom



Students call for action on gun control in Salem.

with a shotgun this month. The school's football coach wrestled the weapon away as students fled.

Brown commended coach Keanon Lowe, a former University of Oregon star wide receiver, for "his very selfless act last week preventing what I think could have been a very horrible situation."

Several student protesters came to the state Capitol on Thursday, but Brown said she would not be meeting with them.

absolutely "But I'm thrilled that they're here in the building," she told reporters. "I think it's so critical, if we're going to continue to make progress around firearm safety, that students remain engaged."

The bill closes a loophole that allowed domestic abusers to hold on to their firearms. House Majority Leader Jennifer Williamson, who sponsored the measure, said a 2015 bill didn't lay out exactly how courts would take away firearms. Some domestic abusers were able to hold on to their weapons by avoiding court hearings.

The new bill prohibits a person subject to certain court protective orders from possessing firearms if the person didn't request a hearing, failed to appear for one or withdrew a hearing request.

On average, over 45 women in the United States are shot and killed by intimate partners each month, according to testimony from Trish Garner of the American Association of University Women of Oregon. Roughly 4.5 million women say an intimate partner has threatened them with a gun, she said.

Lift Every Voice Oregon, an interfaith group that backs gun control, presented to lawmakers on May 15 a letter signed by over 150 faith leaders in Oregon supporting gun control measures, including the one that was killed.

"Youth have cried out for an end to gun violence; in some recent cases, youth have even felt compelled to sacrifice their lives to save their classmates," the group wrote. "We as adults must do more to protect them."

Senate Majority Leader Ginny Burdick, who sponsored the gun measure that was sacrificed, has vowed to work on gun reform in the future.

State House passes sweeping changes to juvenile sentencing rules

By DIRK VANDERHART Oregon Public Broadcasting

The state House on Thursday passed sweeping changes to sentencing rules for juvenile offenders, a dramatic shift to toughon-crime guidelines voters approved 25 years ago.

In a tight vote — held earlier than expected due to a speed-up maneuver by House leadership - representatives voted 40-18 for Senate Bill 1008, the bare minimum required to pass it.

Before the vote, representatives first shot down two alternative proposals floated by Republicans one to modify the bill and refer it to voters, the other simply to refer it to voters. The bill now heads to the desk of Gov. Kate Brown, who will sign it.

"Our juvenile system creates a class of people who reoffend at a higher rate," said state Rep. Jennifer Williamson, D-Portland, a central backer of the sentencing changes. "It targets our communities of color. My question is, 'What is our responsibility knowing that?"

SB 1008 eases rules voters adopted in 1994's Measure 11, which set manda-

sion, SB 1008 had become one of the more contentious criminal justice bills moving through the Legislature. It was the product of more than a year's effort by a legislative workgroup.

The changes have support from a far-ranging swath of organizations — the ACLU of Oregon and Koch Industries are both behind it but also from retired judges, prison guards, the Oregon Department of Corrections and Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum. The support has roots in science that shows juveniles don't have fully developed decision-making ability and concerns that funneling young offenders to the adult prison system creates hardened criminals.

"As people who have worked with these youth, we know firsthand that a majority of them - when given the opportunities, support and guidance - have the capacity to grow and become productive members of our communities," representatives from the prison guards' union wrote the House.

SB 1008 was high-profile enough that it was sped up by House leadership for a vote in an unusual evening session Thursday, a move that required support for rules to be suspended. It also got a nod from Republicans; they've been working to slow down action in the House for several weeks,

but in this case GOP lawmakers agreed to waive a requirement that the 33-page bill be read in full prior to a vote

Still, the bill is contentious. It rankled prosecutors, who didn't want judges to have sole discretion on which juvenile defendants were tried as adults. They argued the legislation should be changed.

"There is broad consensus that we have to change Measure 11 for youth," said state Rep. Mike McLane, R-Powell Butte, who put forth a substitute bill on behalf of the Oregon District Attorneys Association. "How to do it reasonable people disagree.'

Opponents also argued that the bill should go before Oregon voters, since they



approved Measure 11 in the first place. But the bill's backers pointed out that, rules if they secured a twothe same year Measure 11 passed, voters also approved

Measure 10, which allowed lawmakers to alter the thirds vote in the House and Senate.



lory minimum sentences for a collection of serious crimes.

Among its most weighty changes, the bill will ensure that juveniles 15 years of age and older aren't automatically tried as adults for major crimes such as murder, rape and kidnapping. Instead, judges will be able to decide on an individual basis whether a defendant is tried as an adult.

The bill also ensures young offenders aren't sentenced to life without parole, makes them eligible for a parole hearing after serving half their sentence and creates a new pathway for certain defendants to secure early release rather than being transferred to the adult prison system.

After minimal discussion earlier in this legislative ses-

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