

Congress stalemated on guns despite shooting, filibuster

WASHINGTON (AP) — The slaughter in Florida and an attention-grabbing filibuster in the Senate did little to break the election-year stalemate in Congress over guns Thursday, with both sides unwilling to budge and Republicans standing firm against any new legislation opposed by the National Rifle Association.

Democrats renewed their call to action after Sen. Chris Murphy, D-Conn., held the floor along with colleagues in a nearly 15-hour filibuster that lasted into the early hours Thursday.

"We can't just wait, we have to make something happen," said Sen. Cory Booker, D-N.J., at an emotional news conference where

Democrats joined family members of people killed in recent mass shootings. "These are people bound by brutality, and their numbers are growing."

But Republicans were coolly dismissive of Democrats' demands. Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., derided Murphy's filibuster as a "campaign talk-a-thon" that did nothing but delay potential votes.

Noting that a few Democrats had skipped a classified briefing on the Florida nightclub shooting to participate in the filibuster, McConnell chided: "It's hard to think of a clearer contrast for serious work for solutions on the one hand, and endless partisan campaigning on the other."

Democrats spoke of the need for new gun legislation. Republicans cited the threat posed by the Islamic State group, to which Orlando gunman Omar Mateen swore allegiance while killing 49 people in a gay nightclub early Sunday. But the two sides mostly talked past each other, and efforts to forge consensus quickly sputtered out. As a result, the Senate faced the prospect of taking dueling votes beginning Monday on Democratic and GOP bills, all of which looked destined to fail.

The back-and-forth came as President Barack Obama visited the victims' families in Orlando, and called on lawmakers to act.

"Those who defend the easy accessibility of assault weapons

should meet these families and explain why that makes sense," Obama said.

Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton joined Senate Democrats' call for action. Presumptive GOP presidential nominee Donald Trump weighed in with a tweet suggesting he would meet with the NRA and support efforts to keep guns out of the hands of terrorists. Exactly what he would support was unclear.

It's the same exercise the Senate has engaged in time and again after mass shootings. Even after the Newtown, Connecticut, shootings of schoolchildren, the Senate could not pass a bipartisan background checks bill. Moderate

Republican Sen. Susan Collins of Maine criticized the state of affairs as "Groundhog Day."

After the shooting in San Bernardino, California, last year, the effort was downgraded to trying to pass a bill by Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., to keep people on a government terrorism watch list or other suspected terrorists from buying guns, but that too failed.

This time, Feinstein is seeking a revote on her bill. Republicans will offer an alternative by Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas, that would allow the government to delay a gun sale to a suspected terrorist for 72 hours, but require prosecutors to go to court to show probable cause to block the sale permanently.

LEAD: Hermiston tested district schools in 2002-04

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tested 12 locations at its three schools: McNary Heights Elementary School, Clara Brown Middle School and Umatilla High School.

Superintendent Heidi Sipe said the district had relied on the city of Umatilla's water report for water safety information, but that changed with the events in the metro area.

According to the report, none of the 12 locations had unsafe levels of lead.

The Morrow County School District is testing this week. Superintendent Dirk Dirksen said in an email the district "decided as soon as the news broke in Portland about lead in the water, that we need to test for lead in drinking water."

"Additionally," he stated, "we found a need to develop standard protocols that provide routine safety checks for this concern, develop a comprehensive response plan to address any issues found in all schools and facilities, including a communication plan for delivering the information to parents and the community at large."

Hermiston schools Superintendent Fred Maiocco said in an email

"I believe the rationale is that the municipal sources are regularly tested for quality so schools connected to those municipal sources should be safe."

— Fred Maiocco, Hermiston schools Superintendent

that the district tested for lead in 2002-04, and all results "were much less than the (Environmental Protection Agency) standard." The EPA requires public water systems to take action once lead levels reach 15 parts per billion.

"I believe the rationale is that the municipal sources are regularly tested for quality so schools connected to those municipal sources should be safe," Maiocco said in an email. "As a result, we have not regularly tested these schools."

Casey White-Zollman, vice president of communications for BMCC, reported the city of Pendleton "handles all water testing since (BMCC) utilizes city water on campus, so that's not something we maintain the records for. Since the city handles it, that means we also wouldn't have a policy pertaining to the testing." She said the city tests 30 random locations each year for lead, and there

has been no lead reported in city water.

The Pendleton School District also lacks a board policy on testing for lead in water, according to assistant superintendent Tricia Mooney, and the district plans to test this summer.

The city of Helix supplies schools there with water, but Helix Superintendent Darrick Cope said in an email "once it reached our premises, it is hard telling what happens to it as it flows through our pipes."

Helix schools started testing this week and Ione, Milton-Freewater and other districts reported they plan to test and some will create new policies for future testing.

Chemist Beth Read owns Table Rock Analytical Laboratory, Pendleton, which is helping the local districts. The lab is state certified to test drinking water, but not for lead. So Table Rock is working with two other certified labs that

can conduct those tests, Read said.

Table Rock provides everything for testing, she said, from the 250 milliliter bottles to couriers, "so nobody has to worry about anything except taking their samples."

Tests costs \$20-\$25 depending on the number of samples, she said, and the lab offers a discount for volume. Labs try to provide results in 10 business days, Read said, but an increasing number of tests has caused a backlog.

She also said Table Rock has been busier than usual with lead tests. The upswing started with private citizens who own older homes and grew concerned after seeing news reports.

Mulvihill said the schools do not yet know how much it will cost, but state lawmakers in September plan to ask the Legislative Emergency Board to pay for the testing. And testing for harmful elements is not stopping there. School districts have until Sept. 1 to submit plans to the Oregon Health Authority to test for radon.

Contact Phil Wright at pwright@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0833.

PETERSON: Biggest achievement is the \$55M bond that passed in 2013

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He needed some convincing from other staff members to apply for the high school's athletic director position, but once he took the job in 1998, his administrative career took off.

From 2003-2009, Peterson was the principal of Lincoln Primary School, West Hills Intermediate School, Washington Elementary School and Sunridge Middle School.

Still, Peterson wasn't keen when the superintendent position opened up, thinking that he would finish out his career as a building principal.

The late David Baetkey, a school board member and former Pendleton High School teacher, was one of Peterson's earliest supporters for the superintendent job.

InterMountain Education Service District Mark Mulvihill also stepped in to offer encouragement.

Mulvihill said Peterson was the kind of leader the district needed at the time — a "master of relationships" and native son who always manages to keep the focus away from himself. Peterson eventually relented and was hired for the top post in 2009, kicking off a tenure that saw him rally local support for the district's initiatives while struggling to get the same commitment from the state.

The centerpiece of Peterson's achievement is the \$55 million bond the district passed in 2013, which provided money for two new elementary schools, a renovated alternative school that was turned into the Pendleton Early Learning Center, a career technical education center and infrastructure improvements across the district.

"My familiarity with the community, having grown up here, was a definite benefit," he said. "I know a lot of people in Pendleton and I think I was able to have a lot of individualized conversations during that time to explain why we were going out for a bond."

The district was not as successful securing state funding during that time.

Peterson said he still finds it "infuriating" that the state didn't provide more during his time as superintendent, as crowded classrooms and program

cuts plagued Pendleton schools and others around the state.

But overall, Peterson views the last seven years positively and is looking forward to the longterm rewards of the district's recent focus on American Indian and early childhood education.

While he's open to offering himself as a resource to his replacement, Ontario High School Principal Andy Kovach, he wants to give him enough space to make his own mark on the district.

"Change is good," he said. "We're in a position to take a step up and I think the time is right for new leadership."

And even though he's leaving the Pendleton School District, he technically won't stop being a superintendent.

Starting July 1, Peterson said he'll provide superintendent services on a contract basis to the Ione School District, whose own superintendent is also retiring. He'll also begin working part-time as the director of strategic services at the IMESD starting Jan. 1, and oversee some of the IMESD's longterm investments like the Blue Mountain Early Learning Hub.

Mulvihill described it as a "jack-of-all-trades" position that was created to take advantage of the strengths Peterson established when he worked for Pendleton.

After cutting 11 administrative positions since coming to the IMESD in 2008, Mulvihill said he's been looking to rebuild his administration with experienced talents like Peterson's who are already familiar with the area.

"Every kid in this town knows him," Mulvihill said.

The part-time nature of the job will also give more time to spend with his wife, Shelli, his Seattle-based daughter Taylor, and his son Jack, a student at the College of Idaho in Caldwell.

And when he's not out-of-state to visit his children or in Ione to provide guidance for its school system, Peterson will be in Pendleton and working in education, the same as it has been for the past 26 years.

Contact Antonio Sierra at asierra@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0836.

TRAINS: State has no effective way to inspect track bolts

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derailment failed to reveal the defects.

"Until the underlying cause of the bolt failures is understood and a means of detecting this defect is developed, we request a moratorium on running unit oil trains over sections of track that contain track fasteners of this material within the state of Oregon," Hal Gard, administrator of the state's Rail and Public Transit Division, wrote in a June 8 letter to the Federal Railroad Administration.

Despite hiring four additional inspectors last year, the state has no effective way to inspect and test the integrity of those bolts. State inspectors conduct only visual inspections, and defects in the kind of bolts used along the Columbia Gorge are not visible when looking from above, said Matthew Garrett, director of the state transportation department.

Union Pacific conducts a stress test of those metal fasteners, called lag bolts, once every 18 months, using a special vehicle that tests the strength of the bolts, said Justin Jacobs, a spokesman for Union Pacific.

"What that vehicle does is it is designed to go down the tracks and put lateral pressure on rails so if there is a broken bolt, it will detect it," Jacobs said. "That vehicle provides equivalent pressure of a locomotive to the rails."

That specialized equipment is "above and beyond" what the Federal Railroad Administration and the ODOT does in their inspections, Garrett said.

Union Pacific now plans to use that vehicle to inspect the bolts four times a year and plans to replace the older bolts with spiked bolts in the Columbia Gorge by end of year and across the state within the next two years, he

said. The spiked bolts are easier for state inspectors to see, Gard said.

State transportation officials have requested Union Pacific's inspection records, data on the last stress test on the Columbia Gorge line and construction plans. Gard said he wants rail traffic to stop until the Federal Railroad Administration and his agency can verify that Union Pacific's plans are sufficient to keep people safe.

"I need to be able to stand with straight face and say this track is as safe as it possibly can be," Gard said.

The Federal Railroad Administration plans to start a technical investigation specifically into the bolts and is conducting intense inspections on both sides of the Columbia River. Gard said he has yet to receive word on whether the federal agency will grant his request for a moratorium on train

traffic until then.

Union Pacific has a history of violations in the state. Nationwide, the company has paid more in penalties in the last two years than any other railroad, according to *The Oregonian*. None of the Oregon violations concerned defective railroad bolts, which caused the Mosier derailment, the newspaper reported June 10.

Several state leaders earlier last week also requested a moratorium on oil trains in the state, including Oregon Senators Ron Wyden and Jeff Merley, Gov. Kate Brown, and Reps. Earl Blumenauer and Suzanne Bonamici.

In the meantime, Union Pacific trains continue to carry products through the Gorge.

The Capital Bureau is a collaboration between EO Media Group and Pamplin Media Group.

MEETING: Brown's calendar lists two redacted meetings that Sunday

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adding that the union-backed tax measure "has been a part of our discussions for quite awhile. I'm gonna tell you that because I don't want to make a mistake."

But the acknowledgment of the meeting — and its mysterious agenda — adds to the touchy politics around the measure, which could raise as much as \$3 billion a year if it survives an expensive campaign fight from some leading Oregon businesses.

Courtney confirmed that the two had been discussing for weeks whether Brown should call lawmakers back to the Capitol. Courtney, who last year compared the measure with the Civil War and called for compromise, said he talks to Brown all the time and "the issue of" the tax measure "and the special session, that's been there for weeks now."

He also said Brown has yet to rule out a special

session, at least not when they've discussed it. For many observers, Brown's announcement of a spending plan signaled she'd given up on plans to gather lawmakers before the November election.

The revelation that Brown and Courtney were discussing a possible special session at all is somewhat surprising, given that Brown told reporters in March she did not plan to call one. House Speaker Tina Kotek, D-Portland, also has said she's not interested in a special session.

"The governor has never said to me 'I will not call a special session,' in all the times I've talked about (an Initiative Petition 28) special session," Courtney said.

Yet neither Brown nor Courtney would disclose what they talked about in that particular Sunday meeting, which Brown's office said likely took place May 22. Brown's calendar lists two redacted meetings

that Sunday. Brown's spokeswoman, Kristen Grainger, said neither of those was the meeting with Courtney.

Grainger wrote in an email that Brown "said she hadn't really talked with him informally since the session ended in March, so it was just a general check-in, no specific agenda. She said they had a wide ranging discussion."

On June 3, Brown shared her thoughts for how to spend the estimated \$3 billion in annual tax revenue

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